

IV. Fighting Racism on the Job, at School, in the Streets

What is a good affirmative action program? How can we stop the attack on undocumented workers (so-called illegal aliens)? Must racists be allowed freedom of speech? This chapter discusses these questions and specific problems of fighting racism in the areas of public services, housing, etc.

EQUALITY IN HIRING

Who hires people for jobs in this society? The capitalists—and they refuse to hire minority workers. For example, Safeway's warehouse for the San Francisco Bay Area is located in the black ghetto section of Richmond. The percentage of black drivers and warehouse hands there is far below any reasonable measure. From experience, black people in Richmond know they cannot get jobs at the warehouse. The same thing is true in the Denver, Colorado area, where Coors Brewing Co. operates one of the world's largest breweries. The Chicano people around Denver have found they can get jobs there only rarely. The higher unemployment rate among minority workers expresses this pervasive employer

discrimination.

Discrimination in hiring cannot be accepted; it must be changed. Struggles for affirmative action have arisen in many industries and offices because of such discrimination. By affirmative action most people understand that the employer must take real steps to provide jobs to minority people.

The key to winning effective affirmative action is struggle by workers in the industry and the minority community. Such struggle can expose the bureaucratic run-arounds used by employers to screen out people capable of doing the work. It is struggle against the employers that will force them to advertise and recruit in the minority community. Struggle is necessary to make companies train people for work; how else is the cycle of "no experience, no job and no job, no experience" going to be broken? When affirmative action becomes an issue in the plant or the office, then people can force out statistics on minorities hired, review them every three or six months, and expose whether anything is really being done.

These are the elements of real affirmative action: dismantling unnecessary, unfair tests and hiring requirements; reaching out to the minority community to hire workers; setting up employer-financed training programs on the job or at local institutions; and publishing figures widely and frequently to measure results.

The best situation for achieving equality in hiring is a progressive union with control over hiring. For example, in the 1930's the maritime union, not the shipowners, said who shipped out on merchant marine vessels. The union was anti-racist, and it signed up people in line without regard to race, nationality, religion or politics. The capitalist class enacted the Taft-Hartley law after World War Two to outlaw closed shops. But in some situations it is still possible to demand a union-run hiring hall.

Equality in hiring is in all workers' interest. When the boss is allowed to play favorites and be racist in hiring, then the workers' strength is undermined. They may find this out during a strike, when the employer will suddenly scrap all the old requirements if he can hire strikebreakers from among minority people who have not been able to get jobs. Later, of course, the boss fires them and goes back to his racist ways, but the damage has been done—wages are worse and job security is minimal if the strike has been broken.

Affirmative action is a class struggle, not a plan on paper. The U.S. government tries to make affirmative action into a bureaucratic set of rules and quotas, and many big corporations today have some kind of "affirmative action plan." But all these volumes of paper do is divide the workers and get them talking about who can and cannot get a job. The company is not going to educate the workers about their class interest in fighting for equal hiring! And while divisiveness spreads, the re-

sults are minimal. Except for a handful of token positions, such affirmative action plans have not led to real equality in hiring.

Therefore, affirmative action projects need careful examination to see what effect they will have. The company never gives up anything on its own or at the order of a government that serves business. Class struggle is the key. Workers should support equality in hiring and specific measures to achieve it; this will build ties with unemployed minority people who also will carry on the battle for equality. Instead of being divided, workers employed and unemployed of all colors and nationalities can catch the employer in a pincer move and force some jobs, training and resources for affirmative action out of him.

JOB ADVANCEMENT

Advancement on the job requires a struggle against discrimination, too. When hired, minority people find themselves starting at the bottom and kept there—in the coke ovens of the steel companies, in custodial jobs, in the clerical departments of banks, etc.

One of the major methods for keeping minority people down is a crippled seniority system. Sometimes seniority is not used at all: managers are allowed to fill positions with whomever they like from inside the company or out. Besides playing favorites and keeping down certain workers they do not like, management maintains a racist pattern of jobs, too. It is in the interests of all workers to make seniority the basis for awarding jobs. Along with job bidding by seniority, the workers should demand that the company train people for their new positions, too.

Seniority may play a role in job advancement at some companies but be crippled by narrow application. What good are 15 years of seniority in the foundry if they are not ap-

plicable to bidding for machine shop jobs? Where companies limit seniority by department, workers need to struggle against the series of little seniority lists and replace it by one list for the whole workplace and even for all jobs in the corporation or industry. Nor should seniority depend on full-time work. Canneries are notorious for having seasonal jobs held by minority men and women while the year-round jobs in the more skilled positions are held by white men. The minority workers cannot break this pattern if their seniority only applies to bidding for seasonal jobs.

A struggle at a West Coast folding container plant showed how demands for broader seniority fight racism. Jobs were divided into three groups: skilled printers, semi-skilled machine operators, and a "labor pool." The company's minority workers were almost all hired into the labor pool, where they could not bid for job openings in higher groups. There was one exception: a pool worker could bid to become a forklift driver, a job in the machine operator category. But the employer imposed phony qualifications to exclude minorities. The workers organized and demanded access to forklift driver jobs by seniority. After two mass meetings, a petition campaign, a work slowdown in one section and the threat of an informational picket line, the employer agreed to promote from the labor pool by seniority. Almost immediately, the number of minority forklift drivers doubled. From there, the bosses had little choice but to open the other machine operator jobs to minorities, too. The number of minority workers in semi-skilled jobs rose to approximately their proportion of the plant workforce.

All workers gained in this anti-racist struggle. Previously, many white workers had suffered from confinement to the labor pool, too. The bosses punished workers who had ever filed a grievance or had the

slightest physical handicap. Even skilled printers had lost while this favoritism and racism went on. In two successive contract negotiations, the bosses played on divisiveness to force wage settlements well below standard for printers in the region. After this struggle, the company lost some of its advantages.

From the workers' point of view, the positive approach is one that relies on equality in hiring, a strong seniority system, and company-financed training to qualify people for jobs they have bid for.

A divisive mechanism among workers has been superseniority for job advancement. This involves setting up different seniority lists for various "races" or minority groups in the factory or office and then filling new positions back and forth from the top of the separate lists. As a result, workers are led to calculate that someone on the other list is getting ahead with less seniority just for being on the "favored" list.

Superseniority is divisive. The result will be that, although a few good jobs may go to some minority workers, the workers' strength and conditions in the whole plant will suffer from the disunity, in-fighting and individualism that superseniority schemes promote.

Fair advancement on the job is necessary to fight racism. No one should be shut out of a top job because of his or her skin color or nationality. But a few jobs at the top will not eradicate racism. The broad ranks of semi-skilled, middle level, rank-and-file jobs are where most workers will be. At this level a strong fight against employer and union officials' discrimination and favoritism are the key, not schemes of two, three or more special lists. The goal is to achieve the best possible situation for the broad majority of workers—a strong union, equality, a spirit of class

unity and brotherhood, and consequently better wages and working conditions throughout the plant for all.

The capitalist class uses super-seniority to divide workers. Employers, the news media and reactionary trade union bureaucrats across the country boosted the Weber case, a lawsuit involving a superseniority scheme at a Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical plant in Louisiana. Under a program endorsed by the federal government, Kaiser agreed to set up separate black and white seniority lists and to fill craft job openings alternately from one list then the other. All attention was focused on this scheme. The racist pattern in the majority of non-craft jobs in the plant was ignored. Then the capitalist press trumpeted the complaint by white employee Brian Weber that he did not get training for a top craft job before some black workers with less seniority. Weber is a tool of the capitalists. He based his case on a political stand of doing nothing about racism, keeping black workers down, dividing the workforce, strengthening Kaiser's hand, and rewarding a few suck-ups like himself.

In affirmative action struggles, the demands, plans, and educational material will be most effective if they reflect the fact that equality helps all workers in the inevitable struggle against the capitalists. The bosses are the racists. They know that keeping some workers at the bottom and dividing workers among themselves means more profit for the company and less money spent on education and social services. Whenever some workers try to push down other workers, they are only fooling themselves. It means losses for all workers, not only for the minority people.

It all proves again the need to fight racism from a position of class unity among the workers and struggle to make the boss pay. Failure to fight racism will weaken

the workers. So will placing one's hopes in a boss's scheme that is really meant to sabotage the anti-racist struggle.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN COLLEGES

The Bakke case is famous for attacking affirmative action in higher education. With black people and other minorities still under-represented in higher education in the 1970's, Allan Bakke raised the slogan of "reverse discrimination" to demand that he, a 34-year old man with a good job as an engineer, be handed a second career as a doctor on a platter.

Struggle against racism in school admissions means struggle against unfair, slanted tests of the ability to manipulate big words without substance. It means demands for student and community participation in admissions. The struggle involves fighting for resources to help capable minority students who have been put through underfinanced, racist elementary and high school systems. The result must be increasing numbers of minority students.



Demonstration Against Bakke Decision

Expanded admissions is an important demand to help build unity in the anti-racist admissions struggle.

Bakke took advantage of the fact that the University of California medical school kept the number of admissions at 100 per year while setting aside 16 for minorities. But this society does not have enough doctors; the medical profession keeps its income high by restricting the number of physicians trained. A demand for minority admissions combined with expanded admissions (such as designating 20 positions for affirmative action and increasing the total number of slots to 110 at the same time) strengthens the anti-racist struggle in higher education.

DEFENDING PUBLIC SERVICES

Because of racist and national minority oppression, minority people need public services to a great degree. Public health centers, county hospitals, job referral agencies, skills training institutes, anti-drug programs and other community services often mean the difference between hope and despair, between life and death. This makes the fight to defend public services a fight against racism.

With the attack on public services launched at the time of the passage of Proposition 13 in California, the issue has become more important. In a stagnating economy, big capitalists have turned on government services, ordering their politicians to cut them drastically.

All workers need and use public services. One of the most important is education. As soon as Proposition 13 passed, school boards up and down California canceled summer sessions. Budgets for the fall term were cut, teacher raises canceled and classroom sizes increased. All this was not done quietly. San Francisco parents turned out in the hundreds at stormy school board meetings. Working people and their families also use other government services whose hours were cut and whose fees doubled and even tripled—parks,

swimming pools, libraries and social service programs. "Homeowners" paying a mortgage found that Prop. 13 was no free gift. Part of the tax rebate was lost in higher federal income taxes and fire insurance rates. Every time a family has to move and buy a new home, the assessed value is revised to the inflationary prices of the housing market today.

All told, it is working people generally, not only welfare clients, who suffer the effects of the capitalist drive to reduce public services. This is the key to unity in the struggle against service cutbacks that hit minority people especially hard.

FREEDOM AND EQUAL RIGHTS FOR UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

Mexico, the Philippines and other countries are dominated by multinational corporations of the United States and other imperialist countries. To escape the poverty produced by multinational economic strangulation, workers from these countries are often driven to the United States. Here, besides facing the whole range of discrimination against oppressed national minority people, undocumented workers do not even have the freedom to conduct their lives openly. The border patrol and other police hunt them down and deport them. The taxes deducted from their paychecks and added to their bills in stores are lost, because only citizens are allowed to receive many benefits. Employers oppress them especially hard, knowing the weakness of their legal position.

Undocumented workers have been made the scapegoat for the problems of a capitalist economy in crisis, too. Capitalists and trade union bureaucrats who collaborate with them spread the lie that immigrant workers take jobs from other workers. But it is big businessmen who close down steel mills, move factories overseas and demand that pub-



Farmworkers Laboring in the Fields

lic employment be slashed. The problem of unemployment is a product of capitalism. No matter how big or small the U.S. population, the working class is not fully employed because the capitalist system in any country cannot provide full employment.

The latest attack on undocumented workers was contained in a bill supported by both the Carter administration and Senator Edward Kennedy. In the fight against this bill, demands of justice were raised for undocumented workers: halt deportations; stop police harassment of minority workers for identity papers; amnesty for all undocumented workers; and full rights for all taxpaying workers in this country.

Undocumented workers are organizing in the labor movement, too. In 1977, Arizona onion field workers struck the growers for decent wages and working conditions. The strength of their movement prevented the "migra" (the immigration police) from deporting them.

All workers should oppose the oppression of undocumented workers and welcome every worker into trade unions. In the fight against the employer, all workers are brothers and sisters. We should be organized together. By defending undocumented workers and bringing them into the fold of the union, workers can raise wages, dry up the boss's source of alternate labor, and deal another blow to racism and national minority oppression.

FIGHT POLICE AND KLAN VIOLENCE

Tyrone Guyton, Danny Trevino, Barlow Benavidez—these are three of many minority people gunned down by police in the San Francisco Bay Area alone. The same racist murder goes on in Brooklyn, in Houston and across the South.

Police terror must be stopped. We demand, jail killer cops! This demand must be combined with exposure of the role of the police. Murders of minority people are not the work of individual "bad apples"

in the barrel. The entire police force is rotten. It is a tool of capitalist rule whose function is to intimidate minority people, bust up workers' picket lines and attack demonstrations. Cops are recruited to perform this function, trained to act this way, and turned into official goons by the pressure of the whole police force.



Demonstration Against Racist Attacks on Minorities

Sometimes the idea of a police review board is raised. Experience shows that such boards are powerless. They enmesh people in a bureaucracy without real power. The idea of a review board serves to defuse militant mass struggle. For example, the march that followed the police murder of Barlow Benavidez in Oakland, California occurred only after people rejected proposals to concentrate on a review board.

It is also necessary to rally around the call for self-defense against police violence. The police force in Prince George's County, Maryland just outside Washington, D.C. is notorious for racist terrorism. Several black people have died in police custody there. When 15-year old Terrance Johnson was arrested and taken to the police station on a minor theft charge, he defended himself and is now being tried for the death of two policemen. Self-defense is fully justifiable and completely honorable—and the fact that it was racist cops against whom Johnson

had to defend himself exposes the nature of the police.

Many members of the police force belong to the Ku Klux Klan, too. The KKK is a fraternity of racist cowardly terrorists. At Camp Pendleton, California, the military brass encouraged Klan attacks on black Marines. Finally, 14 Marines stood up and defended themselves. The brass prosecuted them for their self-defense. A movement around California arose to demand freedom for the Camp Pendleton 14. This was another movement in support of self-defense against racist violence.

The KKK stages provocations in one city after another. They do not act alone. The Klan is supported by the state; financed by businessmen; made up with a good percentage of cops, sheriffs and sergeants; and publicized heavily by the big television and newspaper media. When we fight the KKK, we are not fighting a fringe group of small-time fascists. The Klan is one more tool of racist violence orchestrated by the capitalist class.

NO FREE SPEECH FOR RACISTS

Along with racist force, the capitalist class brings out phony experts like William Shockley and Arthur Jensen who openly declare that minority people are inferior. Elaborate campaigns, stretching from publication in academic journals to interviews in the mass media, are planned and executed to give them wide publicity. Jensen did not even write his article on black IQ on his own; he followed instructions from the editor of the Harvard Educational Review.

The challenge of these racists has been taken up many times. Their campus speeches have been interrupted and cut short by students demanding no free speech for racists. Lately, the South African government sent around an apologist

for apartheid, but he found himself unable to give his planned speech at Illinois State University, among other places. These rats typically sneak in on last-minute notice, then retreat to the safety of radio and television studios.



Anti-Nazi Demonstration

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has dared to come out in defense of free speech for these racists as well as for Nazis and the KKK. The ACLU says, if we do not allow them free speech, who else will be denied it? But the newspapers, television, colleges and other forums of speech are controlled by the capitalist class. The working class gets access to the means of free speech only when its struggle forces the issue. For every anti-racist pamphlet like this one, printed and distributed by workers at their own expense, capitalist publishers flood us with millions of copies of openly and subtly racist material.

Racism is a crime against people. It is not open to debate; racist theories were long ago shown to be bunk. Jensen manipulated statistics to call two equal to four. Shockley used a British IQ expert, Sir Cyril Burt, to develop his theories. It has been established that Burt made up his data out of his head, co-signed articles with nonexistent names and referred to studies that had never been done. When a new racist comes along with some variation of these lies, it is not necessary to listen to him and

go to the library to disprove him (that can be done later on the side by those interested). The way to fight such racism is to counter-attack and show these racists and their backers that they are walking into a hornet's nest.

PROTECT HOUSING

Black people have long called the federal government's urban renewal program "Negro removal"—moving people out of their homes so that developers can replace them with more profitable luxury housing and commercial buildings. The neighborhood is destroyed, its people left to find housing as best they can, although rents are higher elsewhere.

Asian-American people in San Francisco faced the same attack from businessmen who wanted to tear down the International Hotel, the final home for many retired workers. They were evicted only after the city government confronted thousands of I-Hotel supporters with a military operation by police and sheriffs on the night of August 4, 1977.

Housing at affordable prices is a problem for many workers. The people opposing the police attack on the I-Hotel were angry at businessmen who destroy homes, kick people around, raise rents and build expensive homes for the rich. Minority neighborhoods in downtown areas are the focus of the attack. A strong fight in their defense is a key to the broad fight for more public housing, tenant organizing, and programs to aid home construction that people can afford.

EQUALITY OF LANGUAGES

There is nothing sacred about the English language. People whose native tongue is Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog (Philippines), Portuguese or another language have the right to education in their language.

Such educational programs will help create openings for teachers from these national minority groups, too, another benefit to their advancement. Wherever speakers of various languages are concentrated, even in small but compact communities, they have the right to equality of languages. This applies not only to education but also to economic life. Service businesses like public utilities and the telephone company should provide staff who speak the languages of their clients. In factories and offices, trade union contracts and position openings should be translated into minority languages, too, so that the employer cannot so easily discriminate against them without their knowing it. Trade unions need to demand equality of languages from the boss—and practice it in their own meetings and publications.

BROAD LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

The various demands and struggles in specific areas are connected with each other. Minority people are oppressed by racism and national minority discrimination in all aspects of life. Consequently, broad movements for the liberation of peoples arise. The black liberation struggles of the 1960's swept across all institutions and needs. In 1978, a revival of black struggle in the South occurred in Tupelo, Mississippi. Sparked by police attacks on black people, the movement took up demands for affirmative action by local government and industry, unionization of a local poultry processing operation, and other issues. Tactics have been broad and varied, from boycotts of merchants to marches to strikes, all accompanied by measures of self-defense.

These are great progressive movements. They can be developed to include ranks of workers of all colors. The benefits reinforce each other and help the movement to continue, focused on a narrow target: the wealthy capitalist class.

There is no single set of demands applicable to every battle of a given type. The appropriate demands and tactics to fight each specific instance of racism have to be analyzed to expose the capitalists and unite workers.

Racism and national minority oppression have to be fought by class struggle. This does not mean putting minority demands for equality second to the general workers'



Masses Demonstrate Against Racism and National Minority Oppression

struggle. Just the opposite, a class struggle against racism means rallying the broad ranks of working people white and non-white to the battle against oppression of minority people. The way to do this is to explain to workers why the anti-racist struggle is in their interest—to show them how unity won victories in the past and how a triumph over racism takes a weapon away from the boss and opens the way to still greater gains for all workers.

In the United States, racism is a sharp issue. Inequality cannot be allowed to continue unchallenged. If it is not fought, then all workers will find that they are weak in the face of capitalist attack—white workers cannot evade the question of fighting racism. On the other hand, minority people cannot smash racism on their own. The target is the capitalist class, and the struggle must unite the ma-

majority of active workers—not ignore them and not drive them into the hands of the capitalists—if it is to succeed.

The issue is a real one because racist inequality opens the possibility of diverting some workers into thinking their interest coincides with racist practice. But the fundamental reality is that we are all struggling against capitalist exploitation in one form or another. This truth comes out. Class unity in the fight against racism is a vital necessity, a historical fact many times over, and a real path forward. In the cauldron of struggle, more and more workers are sure to take this road.