

RACISM

STILL A PROBLEM?

Today it's common to hear whites argue that discrimination against minorities doesn't amount to much anymore. "The government gives them everything," or "companies can't fire blacks anymore," or "my boy can't get hired--but any black walking in off the street can"--these ideas and others like them are everyday conversation among whites.

Some people who argue this way freely admit they're prejudiced--that they think blacks are less capable or smart, that all blacks tear up the houses and neighborhoods they live in, and so forth. Others don't think they're prejudiced at all. But whether they think they're prejudiced or not, most whites believe that minorities today have equal if not greater opportunities than whites to get jobs, housing and education.

BLACK INCOMES LAG BEHIND

At first glance, it seems beyond doubt that minorities don't have equal opportunities. For example, Bureau of the Census figures show that black family income in '72 averaged \$6,900 compared with \$11,500 for whites. 33% of black people had to survive on incomes below the poverty line--only 9% of the white population did. Nationwide, black unemployment was twice that of white--10% compared to 5%.

Many whites respond, "so what?" to figures like these. "Blacks would rather be on welfare than work," they say, or "They're too lazy to hold a job." In other words, they believe the opportunities are there, but blacks are either incapable or unwilling to take advantage of them.

But let's take a closer look.

SOCIETAL RACISM STILL EXISTS

There was a recent lawsuit against General Motors in St. Louis. A court found G.M. guilty of discriminating against blacks and women--both in the number hired and in promotions.

The St. Louis fire department is being sued for discriminatory application procedures--of 1,058 uniformed firemen in St. Louis, only 103 are black.

A lawsuit by Concerned Parents of North St. Louis charges among other things that busing in the city is used to maintain segregation rather than end it. For example, 187 students from Windsor were bused to Woerner

school--both mostly white. This was carried out even though it resulted in overcrowding Woerner by about 70 students. Yet the chairman of the St. Louis Board of Education claims busing is done only "to relieve overcrowding," and when overcrowding makes busing necessary, it is used "to increase racial integration whenever possible."

Then there's "blockbusting"--a profitmaking tactic exploited by unscrupulous realtors in which a house is sold to a nonwhite family, after which a scare campaign is mounted to get the rest of the white families in the block to sell cheap to the realtor. According to the Post-Dispatch, in February Blackmore Realty Co. sold a house on Sacramento Avenue in Northwoods to a black family, then sent a postcard saying "know your neighbor" to the whites on the block.

Unless we are to close our eyes to these and countless other occurrences like them, surely we must conclude that opportunities to nonwhites are still restricted--that "for whites only" attitudes still exist in our schools, government and private employment, and the housing market.

YOU CAN'T LEGISLATE PREJUDICE AWAY, BUT . . .

Some people will continue to judge others as inherently inferior simply because of the color of their skin. They will carry race prejudice with them to their graves.

Well, perhaps this is inevitable. But when these attitudes reinforce and



support policies that deprive nonwhites of equal opportunities, they must be fought.

Many of us are aware of examples where bosses will give one group of workers certain privileges denied to the rest of the workforce. We can see how this creates jealousies and divisions--with those at the bottom justifiably unhappy with status--and those on top fighting to stay that one step ahead. The real winner is the boss himself--his workers are too busy scrapping among themselves to give him much trouble.

The same thing is true for society at large with regard to the economic advantages of whites. So long as whites see nonwhites as "the enemy" and participate in policies which hold minorities back, there can be no working class movement with the unity needed to win substantial political and economic gains from the ruling classes in this country.

LAST HIRED FIRST FIRED

A federal Judge in New Orleans struck a powerful blow against racist hiring practices this March. Judge Cassibry ruled that Continental Can and a Louisiana local of the United Steelworkers violated civil rights laws by using seniority as the sole reason for laying off workers at Continental's Harvey, Louisiana plant.

Except for the labor shortage years of W.W.II, Continental didn't hire blacks until the 60's. These discriminatory hiring practices caused all but two blacks to be laid off because of low seniority. The Judge ruled it was illegal to penalize black workers who were the victims of the discriminatory hiring pattern.

On the other hand, Judge Cassibry ruled that whites shouldn't be penalized by laying them off and rehiring the blacks, because the white workers weren't responsible for the injustice. Instead, he directed the company and the union to come up with other possible solutions.

At the same time, Cassibry suggested that money payments by the company to the blacks--similar to the Auto Workers' S.U.B. pay--might be acceptable. A source close to the judge said, "the relief he will approve is not going to penalize the man with seniority rights and it's not going to penalize the blacks, so the brunt will fall on the company." It's about time!

WHO WE ARE

ON THE LINE is written and distributed by people who live and work in St. Louis. The staff includes industrial and hospital workers, students, and community activists. Some of us are members of Worker Unity, a St. Louis organization dedicated to helping build rank and file and grass roots organizations which challenge the control that monopoly corporations and government have over our lives.

ON THE LINE is nonprofit. It is financed by subscriptions and contributions from its readers, a few sales, and from the pockets of its staff.

OTL's pages are open to individuals and groups fighting as we are to build power on shop floors and at the grass roots. In this way, the entire community can learn what people are doing to gain control of their workplaces, hospitals, schools, and communities.

We will also support local struggles with any other labor or informational resources that we are able to make available.

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