

# LABOR, BLACKS, BUILD A PROGRAM THAT WORKS

BY BAYARD RUSTIN

It has been ten years since the federal government launched its manpower development program (MDTA) as part of an effort to improve the economic state of the poor and blacks. Conceived in the high minded idealism of the New Frontier, manpower development was inaugurated in the hopes of providing job training to youths who would otherwise face a lifetime of depressing, dead end jobs because of their lack of education and skills.

The government approached the problem from a number of directions. And while there were some notable instances of success, the failures were more frequent. Programs with lengthy titles whose initials combines into impressive sounding slogans appeared like meteors and, unfortunately, extinguished just as quickly.

Some failed because they contained more rhetoric than substances; others because of poor planning and still others because their sponsors did not understand the realities of a changing employment market. But overshadowing the problems of planning and administration was a simple fact of economics, it is difficult, if not impossible, for any disadvantaged group to achieve upward mobility, no matter how extensively they are tutored and helped, during a period of recession and rising unemployment. And it is just such a situation we have had to cope with since the Nixon Administration took office.

In the light of this background, it is instructive to examine the one program which in the view of government officials, civil rights leaders and trade unionists has accomplished far more than its sponsors dreamed or its critics expected. I am referring to the outreach programs which place blacks and Spanish-speaking youths as apprentices with the building and construction trade unions.

One such program, the Joint Apprenticeship Program sponsored jointly by the Workers Defense League and the A. Phillip Randolph Educational Fund, recently held a conference which in my view symbolized both the magnificent past achievements of the struggle for racial equality and that struggle's equally profound accomplishments of the present.

To begin with, the conference symbolized our progress in breaking down the rigid legal codes of segregation. A few short years ago would not have considered holding a predominantly black conference of several hundred persons in New Orleans. Yet this year we were welcomed at one of the city's leading hotels, and felt free to eat at any restaurant and enjoy the night life without fear of discrimination or insult.

But the conference implied more than our simply having surmounted discrimination in public accommodations. It was as moving an example as I have experienced of the evolution of what began as a struggle for basic human rights "has evolved" into a movement which has succeeded at significantly bettering the daily economic conditions of black people.

Since the outreach concept was initiated on a wide scale in 1967 some 13,000 youths have been placed in union apprenticeship programs through the efforts of the Joint Apprenticeship Program, the Urban League, the Building Trades Council and other organizations. They became apprentices during a time when the economy, and the construction industry in particular, was suffering from government policies which were intended to curb growth and increase joblessness. Yet as joblessness annually reached ever larger peaks, and unemployment among Negroes spiraled to over 10 per cent, more and more apprentices were accepted by the unions. From 1960, when blacks comprised perhaps 1 per cent of building trades apprentices, we have reached the point where the percentage of minority apprentices exceeds the black-white ratio of the general population.

The apprenticeship programs have also enabled us to overcome the mistrust and hostility which festers between two of the most progressive forces in our society--blacks and the union movement.

There were young blacks at the conference who several years ago undoubtedly accepted the myth, fostered by liberals who should know better, that labor was anti-black. These youths now have an understanding of and a feeling for the traditions and achievements of labor and will eventually serve as leaders within the union movement. The outreach programs have also forced union leaders to recognize that assuming a leadership role in the fight for racial equality goes deeper than the endorsement of legislation; it demands a conscious effort to bring blacks into the system even when this does not meet with universal approval from one's own constituency.

During the conference four young black men were honored as outstanding apprentices. All were ghetto youths--one a former narcotics addict--who were confronted with a life on the streets or poverty and frustration before they were taken into the outreach program. Instead they will become skilled construction journeymen, earning \$6 to \$10 an hour and doing socially useful, challenging work. To me, this is what the civil rights movement has been all about.

## DAYCC CONFERENCE WILL FEATURE MAURY WILLS

District Attorney Roy Woofter announced the acceptance of Maury Wills as featured speaker Thursday at opening luncheon of the two-day District Attorney's Young Citizens Council (DAYCC) Issues Conference at the Sahara Hotel.

The popular Los Angeles Dodger shortstop, who is also a performer at the El Cortez Hotel during his off-season months, will give an informal talk about his experiences in baseball to some 60 delegates from Clark County high schools, their faculty advisors and the 65 adult advisors from the community.

Woofter will open the Issues Conference Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m. He will turn the program over to youth representatives for election

(See D.A.Y.C.C. page 16)

## NYC HELPS 5000 KIDS

The nation's largest employer of teenagers and adults is an unqualified success, according to Mike Newson, a human relations worker for the school district, a professional baseball player and a graduate of the program.

He is talking about NYC--the Neighborhood Youth Corps--which provides jobs nationally for 122,000 boys aged 14 to 21 and girls aged 15 to 21 each year. Locally more than 5,000 students have gone through the program in eight years, according to NYC coordinator Chuck Musser.

Newson was an NYC worker while he was a student at Wester High School. He says he would have stayed in school without the program, but he concedes that the money he earned working as a student aide at Kermit Booker Elementary made studying just that much easier. For many NYC students, he says, the job makes all the difference between a high school diploma and dropping out.

NYC is for students from poverty homes, according to Musser. To qualify, a student must live in a home where the income from all sources is less than \$700 per year per family member. Children from aid to dependent children families also qualify. Students must stay in school to remain in the program.

Workers are paid the minimum wage of \$1.65 per hour, and they may work ten hours per week during the school year and not more than 26 hours per week for ten weeks during the summer. Salaries are paid by a Federal grant of \$81,950 to support the program and not by the employer.

Musser says the program reaches virtually all of those students known to qualify, but he is convinced that qualified students exist who have not been identified by himself and his staff of five counselors. He would like to find them, then attempt to get more money to expand the program.

He agrees with Newson that the program works. He cites a study conducted recently by the University of Wisconsin that showed more than 90 percent of NYC graduates fully employed three years after receiving high school diplomas, while a control group of eligible but unreached students had an unemployment rate of nearly 70 percent.


Newson worked at Highland because he was effective in helping younger children learn, according to Musser. Other students are placed in all kinds of jobs, from maintenance to data processing, and in jobs related to their career goals when possible.

Newson's high school diploma, made easier to obtain because of NYC, and his athletic ability give him a bright future. He graduated from Western High in 1967, where he was a member of the state championship baseball and football teams.

Since then he has played professional baseball. In 1969 he was voted the most improved player in Class A ball and in 1971 the most valuable pitcher in AA ball while playing with the San Francisco Giants.


He is with the Atlanta Braves organization now, and leaves shortly for training. This year, he hopes to make it all the way to the major leagues.

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