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THE NEED IN MILWAUKEE FOR EXTENDING
EMPLOYMENT OF NEGROES

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THE NEED IN MILWAUKEE FOR EXTENDING
EMPLOYMENT OF NEGROES

By William F. Hasche

I.

Those members of your association who more than a year ago accepted Mayor Bohn's invitation to serve on Milwaukee's Committee on Interracial Relations have assumed an important civic responsibility and with other members of the Committee are rendering a significant community service. The institute on interracial relations which this Committee sponsored jointly with the Vocational School last year and the active work in which the Committee has engaged to promote community interest and activity in developing interracial understanding and cooperation are part of a developing program that has been organized to bring to all people, irrespective of race, color, religion or nationality, the full enjoyment of their constitutional rights as citizens and the opportunities which all Americans should have. When men prominent in Milwaukee's business and industrial life actively promote such a program, they are making a social and business contribution of great significance to the welfare of the people of the Milwaukee area, greater perhaps than they fully realize. Their able leadership and fine forward social outlook not only entitle them to have our approval and commendation but our active support as well. It is to discuss one aspect of this program, namely, provision for an adequate employment opportunity for Negroes living in the Milwaukee area, that I am here this afternoon.

This is not an easy matter with which to deal. We Americans, however, are known for our ability to analyze difficult problems, organize our activities in relation to them and to get results. Men accustomed to solving difficult industrial

problems will be no less able to solve difficult problems in the field of race relations if they put their minds upon these problems and determine to solve them. The encouraging aspect of this matter is that already there are in various parts of the country, including our own city, those men in business and industry who have attacked these problems and succeeded in solving them satisfactorily for themselves and their organizations.

There are three great obstacles which usually stand in the way of adequate solutions. For none of these is the Negro himself responsible. These obstacles are (1) prejudice, (2) inertia, and (3) inexperience in working with Negroes. A person is prejudiced when he forms "an opinion or leaning adverse to anything without just grounds or before he has sufficient knowledge" to form correct judgments. There are strong prejudices which many white people hold that lead them to act unfairly toward Negroes. Too often they attribute to the group what they see in one or a few individuals. They hold erroneous notions and ideas which warp their judgments and allow them to discriminate against Negroes in a manner contrary to the basic principles of Americanism which we as a nation profess to stand for. They also tend to rationalize about their discriminations in an effort to justify their own attitudes and actions. When such prejudices are held by large numbers of white people, a Negro minority group is bound to suffer at the hands of the white majority in lesser or greater degree. In the interest of fair play it is our duty to analyze these prejudices, determine the true facts, reorganize our judgments where the facts so require, and plan a course of social action consistent with the objective findings our analyses cast up.

Inertia is the second great obstacle. Inertia, when applied to human conduct, is an "indisposition to motion, exertion, or action". It is the tendency to continue to do as we have been doing even when we know we ought to be performing differently. It is the failure to will to correct bad practice, to leave to others

the responsibility for taking the initiative in matters about which something ought to be done. Apathy and indifference are forms of inertia that retard action and defer needed relief.

Inexperience is the third obstruction. Men frequently hesitate to perform in areas where they have never performed before. They often doubt their ability to perform effectively and are inhibited by their inexperience because they are not sure they can succeed. For that reason many never try.

All three of these factors - prejudice, inertia, and inexperience, are present obstructions to which we can attribute in large measure the failure of the Milwaukee business and industrial community to deal more adequately and effectively with Negro employment. To date our success in Milwaukee has been inadequate and only partially effective even though we have done relatively better than other American cities of comparable or larger size.

II.

There are at least seven reasons why we should study this matter thoroughly now and take appropriate action on our findings. The first reason is, it is the proper thing to do. The second reason is that we can do a better job of it now, and do it more easily, than we can at any later date. The third is that we should put our American principles into practice. The fourth is that Negro citizens of our community need our help. The fifth is that it is consistent with a system of free enterprise and therefore is good business. The sixth is that it will avert the intensification of race hatred and bitterness and improve race relations. The seventh is that we cannot escape from doing something constructive about the problem ultimately if we fail to do so now.

A partial analysis of the prejudices held by many white people shows that they believe quite generally that Negroes are inferior people incapable of reaching the levels of ability and success of white people. They assume that Negroes collec-

tively are lazy and undependable. They believe them to be fitted for menial jobs only. One can list other beliefs white people associate with Negroes as a race. They overlook that every counterpart of these characteristics may be observed among white people as well. They fail to realize too that unconsciously they have been exposed to educations which have strengthened these impressions. Negro scenes on the screen and pictures in newspapers, magazines and comic sheets have overemphasized the stereotypes of Negro life. The Negro has been given prominence as a cotton picker, a waiter, a Pullman porter, a day laborer, a minstrel or an end man. Indolence as a Negro characteristic has often been accentuated unfairly. But no rightful treatment has been given to Negroes in other classifications of employment to the degree that is the Negro's due. Negroes have been right in the request that their industry and achievements be given proper recognition in order that white people may get a proper understanding of their abilities, achievements and progress.

It would be a long story to relate the sins of white men who were responsible for taking Negroes out of their native environment in Africa and placing them in slavery in our own country. All scientific investigators of primitive peoples know, for example, that morality among tribal people is on a higher plane than in many quarters in civilized communities. American lynchings have been common in past decades in Negro populated areas whenever Negro males transgressed the social laws and attacked white women. But Negro males have never been able in our country, except rarely, to punish their white owners or neighbors who violated the chastity of their own helpless Negro women. We can hold no brief for these transgressions of either Negroes or white men. They are to be condemned in either race. But when we point an accusing finger at Negro transgressors we should remember that white men have no record to boast of on the same count.

For a long time Negroes were kept ignorant. The opportunities of schooling were denied to them. Even today Southern states provide inferior elementary, sec-

onday and collegiate schools which are less generously supported than are those for white-children and youth. But in spite of all these and many other handicaps, in the remarkably short period of time that has elapsed since the Civil War (a period of 80 years) the American Negro has made great progress. We deceive ourselves if we believe these people to be capable of little more than menial work. Everyone here who has not seen the exhibition of portraits which the Mayor's Committee on Interracial Relations has brought to the Art Institute of Milwaukee should see this exhibit before it is taken away on the 30th of this month. There on the walls of the Art Institute are the pictures of prominent Americans of Negro origin who have reached positions of great responsibility in many fields and made notable contributions to the welfare of our country. Negroes are not inferior to white people intellectually. But they have been given an inferior opportunity in many areas of the United States to develop the intelligence they have.

Intelligence is not related to the color of the skin of people. In all races the distribution of intelligence follows a normal distribution curve. Intelligence is an individual matter and when we deal with it we must deal with it on an individual basis. It certainly is a mark of intelligence that people who are denied their just opportunities will migrate from areas of discrimination to areas where they can get juster treatment. When such people arrive in our community we must recognize that the deficiencies they have are highly accentuated because of this denial of their rights to a good education and are not due to a lack of intelligence primarily. Only a small fraction of them are incapable because of intellectual lacks. We who work in educational institutions can find similar and numerous cases of white people who are similarly deficient. The truth is that Negroes have the type of intelligence that will respond to education. Under the influence of education, especially when it is coupled with encouragement and protection, Negroes can achieve what equally intelligent white people are capable of achieving. The lives of thousands of white American servicemen in the war just closed were saved, for example, because a negro surgeon,

Dr. Drew, whose portrait you may see at the Art Institute, did the basic research work by which the blood plasma process was developed that has been so great a boon to men wounded on the field of battle. How fortunate it was that this very capable surgeon secured an adequate education in the field of medicine.

The potentialities of Negroes are great and it is morally and economically sensible to develop these great possibilities to the fullest extent. We white people out of simple justice owe it to ourselves and to the Negro minorities to inform ourselves fully as to the truth about these things. When we do so we shall have to conclude that Negro people can work effectively in every area where white people can work effectively. We shall have to conclude further that the arguments of intellectual inferiority cannot be used by white people as a justification for denying Negroes a real opportunity to work. Restriction of Negroes to menial jobs is unjust and un-American.

If you and I will recognize these fundamental truths, logic will compel us to reason that we ought to overcome our inertia by acting promptly in this matter and not to let our inexperience in dealing with Negro personnel deter us from taking appropriate action. Just as we have attacked other pressing and troublesome problems so can we attack this one successfully. We need but exercise sufficient will power to overcome our inertia and take appropriate steps to develop proper procedures and techniques to gain skill in dealing with Negro employment to everybody's good.

III.

I have said there are at least seven reasons why we should study this matter and discharge our responsibilities concerning it. First, I stated that study of this problem now and appropriate action concerning it are the right things to do. Honest analysis indicates they are the proper things to do.

Second, I stated we can do a better job of it now and do it more easily than we can at any later date. The Negro minority has leadership in Milwaukee that is intelligent, law-abiding and co-operative. Among the leaders are those who have confidence in the integrity of the industrial leaders of your association who are serving on the Mayor's Committee. They believe also in the integrity of many public officials and civic leaders. They have shown a readiness to work with their white friends to the end that good understanding and co-operation may be developed. Under such circumstances it is easier to get better results than when this faith in the integrity of the white leadership of the community is lost. It will be forfeited in this post-war period if industrialists and business people lay off Negroes pending reconversion and then fail to rehire them later when a soft labor market can supply workers readily. Such a course would invite hatred and resentment. Once bitterness develops because of a resumption of obvious discrimination in employment, the task will be infinitely harder than it is now.

I gave as a third reason the soundness of the program on the basis of our Americanism. Much can be said to this subject. I will content myself by pointing out briefly that in a world in which the combined populations of all the countries on the globe consist of colored and white people in the ratio of two to one, we will sacrifice our position of world leadership if we fail to practice our principles of American freedom and justice at home. We not only do justice to our colored minority groups if we attack this problem honestly but we will strengthen our prestige abroad. The proper course taken now will make the voice of our country strong throughout the world. We will thereby establish a permanent position of leadership that will develop international friendship and confidence in our integrity.

A pressing fourth reason is the need of Negro citizens of this area. They are largely dependent upon white people who own the businesses and manufacturing plants that can provide employment. Negro people need health, shelter, food, clothes,

recreation, education, and cultural opportunities. In this their needs are the same as those of white people. The community provides education and some recreation at public expense. Earned income, however, is necessary to secure the other necessities of life. Employment alone can provide the needed income to provide adequate support. Since the control of employment rests largely with white employers, a moral obligation rests upon employers to satisfy the legitimate needs for employment upon which the economic welfare of Negro people depends.

The fifth reason I offered is that it is consistent with a system of free enterprise and therefore is good business. A system of free enterprise must include all people. If it does not do that it is not a system of free enterprise. Freedom for a majority and restriction for a minority is not free enterprise. Instead it becomes a system of privilege for some and submergence and suppression for others. Such a system would not only be unAmerican, it would also be poor business.

Animals have no business. Nor can they be educated to have business.

Primitive people barter along simple lines. They have a little education and also a little business. The greatest business exists where the greatest amount of education exists and where people are allowed full freedom to develop their abilities and to employ them. They thereby raise their standards of living and thus enter the markets as good purchasers and consumers. It is good business to develop good markets. Only employed people who have economic support can become good customers. It is poor business to fail to develop the purchasing power of people by withholding from them the economic opportunities they need to develop it.

The sixth reason I gave is the elimination of hatred and bitterness that underprivileged minorities develop under discrimination. Inferiority complexes are developed when a white majority discriminates against Negro people in the matter of employment. Like pressure in a boiler that has no safety valve, or one that will not function, there is bound to be a reaction that will be bad for white and Negro people

alike. Poverty, murder, vice, crimes of other kinds and delinquency take a terrible toll from both races. Not only is great suffering generated but public danger is greatly increased. Both financial and social costs will run high. In other American cities, when tensions have run very high, explosive conditions have resulted in race riots and killings. White employers who refuse to make available their share of the employment that would prevent these social hazards and physical dangers must recognize that indirectly they are responsible to a degree for contributing to hazards of this kind. It is better and cheaper to put Negro minorities on payrolls than to carry them as relief cases or criminals on the tax rolls.

And lastly we must recognize that we shall be compelled to do something about Negro employment anyway. When things come to the breaking point we will have solved nothing. Under these circumstances we shall be driven out of sheer concern for the good of everybody and our own safety to provide employment to Negroes willing to work and capable of rendering services in fields where services are wanted. No matter what our motives ^{may} be, whether we act for selfish reasons or for unselfish ones, the only right course we can pursue profitably is to open up work opportunity to Negroes now on the same terms as we do to white people.

It should be observed further that because attention to this matter is already overdue, groups that suffer discrimination at the hands of white majorities have succeeded in securing national executive orders and in some states, our own included, fair employment practices legislation which exposes employers to a type of supervision which might have been avoided had a generous and fair employment policy been followed long ago. Corrective legislation usually comes when an abuse of power is practiced too long to the detriment of a portion or all the people of a state or the nation.

Nor must we overlook the fact that Negroes by and large are receiving better educational opportunities than formerly. There is no discrimination in Milwaukee in

educational opportunity for Negroes. It is to the credit of Negroes that they are availing themselves increasingly of these educational opportunities and thereby preparing themselves to become useful citizens. They are more literate. Literate people, however, become more vocal and demonstrative than illiterate people when their rights are denied to them. Under provocation they will not remain submissive. They will use their voices and their press to assert their rights. In some American cities where Negroes have severely difficult conditions to overcome, their press has become very bitter and critical. And added to this expression will be the force of the returning Negro soldiers who fought for their country and desire to be good Americans. The white majority should want to correct discrimination in employment because it is American, socially just, and right, rather than out of fear of the explosive possibilities and consequences that will follow failure to make needed corrections now. But it must be remembered that aggressive resistance by Negroes to unfair discriminations will surely follow in any community where such discriminations continue unabated.

IV.

It is in order at this point to say something concerning procedures and techniques. To undertake the employment of Negroes in a plant or business in which they have not been employed before by plunging in headlong without proper preparation is just as bad as doing nothing at all. I said earlier this is not an easy matter with which to deal. It is important that proper personnel practices and procedures be used to select and induct Negro employes. While no employer can hide behind the fact that his white employes will in some instances resent the induction of Negroes, he cannot overlook that fact either. The war we have just concluded successfully has fortunately given many corporations, companies and individual employers experience in employing Negroes. Negroes received more consideration during the war than ever before and were given jobs when the white labor market was practically exhausted.

There is a collective background of experience now available that enables us to determine what to do and what not to do. Proper preparation is absolutely essential both for white and Negro employees when Negroes are inducted for the first time in any plant or business. This range of experience of others in employing Negroes is now wide enough to cover a very large number of occupations. Not only are Negroes employed today in offices, stores, factories, businesses, and the occupations in which they have served traditionally for a long time, such as domestics, laborers, farm workers, postmen, etc., but they are found in the professions also, including the fields of education, law, medicine, surgery, religion, and lately but still in a small way, in engineering. They are found not only in the ranks of workers but also in supervisory positions. White employers who have employed them have learned that there are simple but effective rules that should be observed in employing Negroes for the first time and in expanding work forces.

Large department stores in New York City have learned that proper procedures and techniques will soon accustom white workers to Negro associates and white customers to Negro sales people. The principle followed was to broaden the range of jobs to Negroes taking them on the labor level first and gradually including jobs in other classifications. First assignments were to the janitorial positions. Later they were assigned to stockroom jobs. Somewhat later they were given trucking jobs which brought them into the stores where other employees and customers could see them. Still later employment as bundlers was provided in the stores. Next Negroes were employed as cashiers. Finally, after both customers and employees had become accustomed to seeing Negroes about the stores in various capacities for a considerable period of time, Negroes were trained to sell and given sales positions. One such store has over 600 Negro employees in this variety of positions in its store in New York City. Other department stores of New York as well as Boston have negotiated a similar employment policy successfully and have been operating on the new basis long enough to test it adequately. The policy has stood up well under this test.

A careful policy of selection should be followed to fit the worker to the job he is to be given. Schools are in a position to assist both in selecting and training Negro workers. It should be recognized, however, that Negroes who have migrated from the South from rural areas are unaccustomed to metropolitan industry and business and must be helped to make a successful transition to city customs and requirements when employed. Personnel and training officers must allow for this rural background, deficiencies in education, and compensate by patience with firm but kind persistence in developing the qualities of regularity, good workmanship, and proper job performance through appropriate instruction and training.

In launching a program of Negro employment employers must recognize that their supervisory staffs - superintendents, foremen, and assistant foremen - must also be trained to supervise and train Negroes and to develop proper working relations between white and Negro workers. Personnel officers likewise must inform themselves fully concerning these matters before they attempt to employ Negroes. Any haphazard method is bound to bring grief. Orderly procedures accompanied by good instructional techniques will develop competency, good will and harmony among employees.

The employer himself, once he authorizes the policy of Negro employment, must deal firmly with it. If a union is involved, the policy should also be taken up with union representatives and explained to them. Unions like employers have been discriminatory. They too, like employers, are increasingly recognizing their responsibilities toward Negro minorities.

In one Milwaukee industry three white women refused to have their work inspected by a Negro woman inspector. Both the employer and the union held firmly to the decision that the Negro woman would keep her job as inspector as long as she performed her work properly. This initial firmness by the employer and the union representative led to only two discharges and to prompt acceptance by the other workers of the fact that Negro employees were to be employed on equal terms with white

employees in that plant. Such firmness invariably brings results.

Time does not permit a detailed discussion of all the points involved in the processes of selection, induction and adjustment. The proper thing to do is to train both personnel and supervisors in the policies and techniques required to insure success before the employment of Negroes is initiated. This will be a service to both Negro and white employees.

Here in Milwaukee the climate for launching this program of action successfully is still very favorable because of the fine work of the Mayor's Committee on Interracial Relations, the Urban League, and other organizations. The effort of these organizations should now be followed up by prompt action by employers working collectively. Negroes must feel that they will receive a fair break from all employers. If the highest officials of all corporations and companies together take collective action by adopting a similar policy simultaneously, and take steps properly to prepare their personnel officers and supervisory staffs and then follow this up by the careful procedures followed by manufacturers, business executives, store managers and others who have already adopted such policies here and elsewhere, they will find the problem relatively easy to solve. Those responsible to them will respect and enforce the policy once they understand their superiors mean business in administering this policy.

The Vocational School has worked on this problem and has been helpful to employers in quite a number of instances. It is prepared to help in training supervisors, in training Negroes in essential skills and knowledges, and in recommending good candidates for employment when they are available. It stands ready to help employers analyze their situations. It stands ready, too, to assist your industries in launching a properly conceived program of Negro employment and will work with any committee or individuals assigned by your association as a whole or by your member companies in effecting a smooth integration of Negro workers with white em-

ployes through the various services the school is in a position to offer.

Before closing I want to point out that a policy of fair dealing in employment need not be based on tolerating people who do poor work, who fail to report promptly for work or absent themselves without cause, or refuse to cooperate with supervisors and fellow workers as they should. Leaders among Negroes of Milwaukee are stressing the necessity of developing desirable personal qualifications, job competency, good work habits, and personal improvement. They are instructing their people that they must meet white men's standards in the factories, warehouses, stores and offices where job opportunities are provided for them. Likewise I want you to know that the Vocational School stresses these points with great firmness in all its relations with such students as it trains - white or Negro. These matters have been receiving and will continue to receive emphatic consideration. There is no disposition to let an incompetent Negro worker raise the cry of discrimination if he fails to perform his work properly and must be discharged. But, and this we must never forget, no employer has ever yet, had an organization of all white employes among whom there were not some who failed to qualify and had to be discharged. That cannot be entirely avoided in dealing with Negro employes. Irrespective of color, such cases should be handled on the basis of their individual merit. The right to equal treatment implies that incompetent Negroes must expect that they will be replaced by others who are competent.

Finally I wish to say that exhaustive study of the literature; observation of Negroes in schools such as Hampton Institute at Hampton, Virginia, and Tuskegee Institute at Tuskegee, Alabama, and public schools in both Northern and Southern cities; and a study of Negro performance and success in occupational life following careful selection, proper training and satisfactory adjustment, have convinced me that American industry will serve itself best as well as the people of the white and colored races if it will embark promptly upon a fair, firm and just policy of em-

employing workers without respect to race and color and adopt sound selection, induction and training programs in administering such a policy of employment.

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