

Communications



HOW UNION LEADERS VIEW JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

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How do LOCAL UNION LEADERS view manpower training programs for hard-core-disadvantaged blacks? How do they perceive their members' attitudes towards these training programs? Do unions block the implementation of job training, or do they support it?¹ What are the union leaders' views on special treatment and double work standards for the hard-core-disadvantaged black trainees? How difficult do union leaders think it will be for these trainees to achieve the educational standards set by the firms?²

We, along with Myron D. Fottler, explored some aspects of these questions in fairly intensive interviews with 51 local and regional union leaders in western New York.³ Thirty-six union respondents had experience with similar on-the-job training. Fifteen had never been involved in such manpower training programs.

There was a marked difference in the responses of the two groups. More than half of those who had experience with training programs said that their members would support working with such trainees. But only a third of those who had not previously worked with this type of program said they expected their members to support such programs. Even if the respondents were simply projecting their own feelings, it is not unlikely that their views reflected real changes in the attitudes of the union members as a result of the members' previous involvement in job training projects.

Comparison can be made between the interview responses of 115 employers in a coupled on-the-job

training program in western New York (Jobs, Education, and Training—Project JET)⁴ and 115 employers not participating in the program. Of those employers who had taken an active role in Jobs, Education, and Training, 53 percent indicated that their employees supported this type of training. Only 24 percent of those employers who had not taken an active role viewed their employees as sympathetic to the program. These responses of employers corresponded fairly closely with those of the union leaders.

Why did almost 41 percent of the union leaders and 47 percent of the employers who had dealt with training programs for hard-core-disadvantaged blacks answer negatively? A main concern was job security.⁵ One union respondent said, "At first the workers disliked the idea—they expressed fear of job loss and loss of overtime." Another commented, "There are so many people to a machine, and when absent and tardy, it is hard for efficiency—people didn't complain, but supervision had a lot of trouble." He meant that management has difficulty adapting to interruptions in the production process created by the poor work habits (absenteeism) of some trainees.

Is closer supervision of employees in these programs than of other new employees necessary? About one-third of those union leaders who had not had contact with training programs said yes. Only a small number of those union officials who had previously worked with such projects responded affirmatively. However, about 45 percent of those who had dealt with such programs said that some extra help should be given to the trainees in their first 3 or 4 weeks on the job.⁶

Union leaders generally opposed special treatment (accelerated promotion, exceptions to seniority, and lower work standards) for trainees. The overwhelming preference of trade union officials, both those who had worked with manpower programs and those who had not, was for promotion on the basis of seniority where merit is equal, and for equal work standards.⁷

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Union leaders were asked if they thought it possible to bring the trainees up to an eighth grade educational level. Over 60 percent of the union respondents said yes, it was possible. Of the employers not participating in Jobs, Education, and Training, 72 percent were optimistic about the educational possibilities of the hard-core-disadvantaged blacks. In contrast, only 39 percent of those who had taken part in Jobs, Education, and Training thought that the educational standard could be easily raised. Perhaps these employers project higher job requirements than are necessary; however, it could also be that their

experience with such programs discouraged them.

In all, a good majority of union respondents said their members would work cooperatively with the disadvantaged, if the regular employees' fears of job loss were allayed. Although many union officials advocated extra supervision for trainees in the early weeks of work and were in favor of training programs, very few supported the idea of dual work standards. Most of the union leaders surveyed supported, and thought that their constituents would support, public policy measures aimed at employing the hard-core-disadvantaged. □

—FOOTNOTES—

¹ For example, see *Wall Street Journal*, December 21, 1970.

² There have been very few empirical studies of the union role in training blacks. One is Louis A. Ferman, *The Negro and Equal Employment Opportunities: A Review of Management Experiences in Twenty Companies* (U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1968, Monograph 9), chapter VI, pp. 119-127.

³ Myron D. Fottler is professor of industrial relations, State University of New York at Buffalo. The interviews, carried out under contract with the Office of Manpower Research, U.S. Department of Labor, were administered by the Survey Research Center of the State University of New York at Buffalo in the Spring of 1970.

⁴ For description of the development of "coupled-OJT" programs, see Garth L. Mangum, *MDTA: Foundations of Federal Manpower Policy* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), pp. 92-93. For an account of the origin and operation of the NAB-JOBS program, see Sar A. Levitan,

Garth L. Mangum, and Robert Taggart III, *Economic Opportunity in the Ghetto: The Partnership of Government and Business* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 17-45.

⁵ See also Derek C. Bok and John T. Dunlop, *Labor and the American Community* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1970), pp. 2440-2441. "Some labor officials have actually blocked efforts to place the graduates of government training programs because of fear that jobs and wages of union members would somehow be impaired."

⁶ For further reading, see John L. Iacobelli, "A Survey of Employer Attitudes Toward Training the Disadvantaged," *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1970, pp. 51-56.

⁷ Ferman, op. cit., p. iv, " . . . union leaders give relatively little opposition to equal employment practices unless these come into direct opposition to the job rights of white workers." Unions were unwilling "to compromise with long-established sets of institutional values—seniority and apprenticeship."