

XXI

The FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE COMMITTEE

With the United States accelerating "all aid short of war" to the war-besieged allies, employers were hiring whites as fast as they walked in the doors but not Negroes and other ~~and~~ minorities. This injustice infuriated black leaders and so for months in late 1940 and early 1941 they entreated the government to take steps to eliminate this appalling injustice of employers. final date (year)

But their appeals fell on deaf ears. As far as the Negroes and Spanish-speaking Americans and even Jews were concerned, the lack of jobs continued. There was no let-up in their long depression. ?

The American Year Book, 1944, shows that in ~~1940~~ 1941 there were 44,166,083 persons, excluding emergency workers, employed out of our total population. Of this number 40,495,089 were white; 4,070,994 were non-white. The non-whites were heavily concentrated $\frac{1}{m}$ 15.1 percent $\frac{1}{m}$ in farming, and 13.5 percent were employed in the crafts or as operators compared to 31.6 percent for whites. figures 0/2/3

In the early months of our defense build-up, the government did make some effort to determine how many Negroes could be absorbed in defense plants. Louis Coleridge Keselman in his book, The Social Politics of FEPC, wrote the State Commission on the Condition of the Colored Urban Population of Illinois sent out a questionnaire to Illinois defense plants and received 146 replies. ^{Ninety = five} 95 or two-thirds replied that no Negroes were employed. In the 51 plants utilizing non-white workers, Negroes comprised only 3.6 percent of comprised

Ethridge

p. 222

215

✓
top 12

the total working force, ^{and of that small proportion} of which 70 percent were unskilled workers.

In the field of vocational training, Social Security Board figures for the six months from August, 1940, to January, 1941, showed that of 89, 529 applicants accepted for vocational training throughout the country, 2, 343 were non-white, and of the 15,559 placements only 50 were non-white.

Attempts to get Negroes in airplane plants, ^{employment for craft} ~~factories~~ ^{by} concerned religious groups, such as the American Unitarian Association, in 1941, elicited shocking answers. ^{sp?} ⁷⁻¹⁰⁻⁴¹ ¹² ~~Vulte~~ of Nashville wrote:

"We do not believe it advisable to include colored people in our working force. We may at a later date be in a position to add some colored people in minor capacities such as porters and cleaners."

And North American Aviation Inc. replied: ~~as follows:~~

"We will receive applications from both white and colored workers. However, the Negro will be considered only as janitors and in other similar capacities.... It is against the company policy to ~~hire~~ employ them as mechanics or aircraft workers... Regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not hire them."

Naturally, the tension and rage among the Negro population mounted. Negro leaders made angry speeches, held conferences, passed resolutions. However, the first unmistakable summons for action wasn't sounded until February, 1941, when A. Phillips Randolph, international president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, called a conference of influential Negro leaders "to discuss ways and means of securing a more ^{eq} suitable ^{share} ~~share~~ of the new jobs opening up. Out of this

not your bottom

developed the "March on Washington Movement" (MOWM) that caught fire among the jobless. And Randolph's declaration in May added more kindling. He thundered: "The Administration leaders in Washington will never give the Negro justice until they see masses ^{of Negroes} ten, twenty, fifty thousand Negroes on the White House lawn."

At first Mr. Roosevelt and other public officials paid little notice ^{to} of the MOWM, though it was inspiring rallies and organizing committees all over the country; but when Randolph announced a definite date ^{of} July 1st ^{for} the march, they ^{wake} ~~waked~~ up to the seriousness of the situation. Fifty thousand Negroes ^{protesting in} ~~gathering~~ Washington could cause an unfavorable reaction abroad and increase uneasiness and dissatisfaction at home.

The President ^{sent} ~~sent~~ a letter to the chairman of the Office of Production Management, declaring the government could not permit discrimination against American citizens in defense plants. It had no effect. Randolph did not call off the march.

Mr. Roosevelt had to act, and quickly. On June 25, he issued Executive Order No. 8802, ~~which~~ which began:

"Whereas it is the ~~the~~ policy of the United States to encourage the full participation in the national defense program by all citizens of the United States, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, in the firm belief that the Democratic way of life ~~can~~ within the nation can be defended successfully only ~~by~~ with the help and support of all groups within its borders. ^{and appointed Mark as chairman, explaining}

He then established ^{the} Committee on Fair Employment Practice and ^{appointed} ~~appointed~~ ^{to} ~~explaining to~~ Mark ^{to} ~~as~~ chairman. ^{Mark he wanted a white Southerner} ~~Mark he wanted a white Southerner~~ sympathetic to the Negro cause. The other members of the committee

were Phillip Murray, president of the CIO; William Green, president of the AFL; David Sarnoff, head of the Radio Corporation of America; William Webster, Randolph's lieutenant in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and Earl B. Duckinson, Chicago alderman. Mark felt it was a strong, across-the-board committee.

Randolph called off the March on Washington.

The Committee, however, had little actual ~~political~~ power. Its work, according to Executive Order No. 8802, was "to receive and investigate complaints of discrimination in violation of the provisions of the order and to take appropriate steps to address valid grievances as well as to recommend further measures to the government and the President necessary to carry out the order." Its investigations were limited to industries under government contract and to government agencies involved with vocational and training programs.

It had very little financial support. The money total^{ly} ~~along~~ \$43,324 for the fiscal year ending June 10, 1942, came from the President's emergency fund. It supported a staff of eight ¹/_m an executive secretary, an assistant executive secretary, and six investigators ¹/_m for the whole country.

The Committee's task was extremely frustrating and difficult.

~~Mark said all his friends look at him as if he had swallowed something nasty.~~ The first year ^{at} the committee ^{held} ~~board~~ hearing^s in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Washington, and Birmingham. involving forty-nine industries, unions, and defense training programs. Discrimination ^{was} ~~settled~~ rampant. Seventy-five percent ^c of the cases investigated involved Negroes, 10 percent Jews, and ~~15~~ 15 percent other minorities.

On May 25, 1942, ~~Mark~~ after almost a year devoted to the work of the committee, Mark resigned his chairmanship, ~~but remained a member of the committee.~~ The United States was now a full participant in the war and Mark needed to give more attention to the newspapers. The grave shortage of newsprint, the loss of members of the newspaper staff to various branches of the service, the voluntary curtailment of war news and many other problems required his presence at home. But he stayed a member of the Committee and, as a ~~loyal~~ ~~member~~ member, he caused a greater furor than he ever had as chairman.

The new chairman, Dr. Malcolm McLean, president of Hapton Institute, asked Mark to open the hearings in Birmingham in June, 1942, with a short talk on race relations in the south.

Mark began: "The Committee came into being ~~not~~ not to create, but to ease tensions. It was born of tensions... of the perfectly legitimate feeling upon the part of the minority groups in this country that, since we are to fight to the death to preserve freedom, all of us have a right to participate, both as members of the armed forces and as workers in our war industries.

"When we consider that... ~~we find~~ ^[lies] about 40 percent of our total population within the spheres in which prejudice ~~exists~~ operates, ~~we~~ ^{we} are presented with ~~the question~~ whether we can afford not to have the minorities accorded full participation in the war effort.

"The answer is obviously that we cannot allow anything to stand in the way of an all-out effort. From the military standpoint, if we build an army and navy of 10,000,000 or 12,000,000 men, we shall need every man of every race and creed either to bear arms or to make arms....

"From the standpoint of employment we do need and will need more ^{workers} and more ^{until} until we build enough ships to sink the submarines that have operated off the Gulf Coast and in other waters, enough ships to haul the implements of war to our troops abroad and to our hard-pressed allies; we will need every hand that can run a machine. There should be only one test of employment in a war industry at a time like this, at any time in which the national life is imperiled; we cannot afford any other test than that a man has the 'know-how' or can acquire it to operate machines that turn out war goods."

workers
 most
 +
 now
 what?
 people?
 be
 "hand"
 below

So far, so good; but ^{then} Mark ventured into exceedingly tricky waters in an attempt to calm the fears of many Southern whites who were endeavoring to obstruct the Committee's efforts because they held the notion that President Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802, ~~setting up the Committee and giving it the power to order employment regardless of race, creed, color, or national~~

~~originally~~ ^{was} ~~had~~ aimed at doing away with segregation.

^{continued}
Mark said: "This is a time for all of us, particularly for us of the South, to be coldly realistic. We are too often inclined to confuse the rational and emotional approach to the problem of the Negro and the white man living together amiably and peacefully... ~~when we get in the field of emotional~~ ~~when~~ when somebody mentions social equality, the abolition of Jim Crowism or segregation.

"Individual members of the Committee have their own ideas about that and I do not pretend to speak for them, but the Committee has taken no position on the question of segregation of industrial workers. It has recognized that the President was not endeavoring in Executive Order 8802 to write a social document; he was writing, as the language of the order plainly shows, a document designed to secure the fullest use of the manpower available to us....

"Had I conceived it to be [a social document] I should not have accepted membership on the committee, because I would have regarded it as a perfectly futile, if not dangerous, gesture on the part of the President; because I would have conceived it to be disruptive, rather than unifying in that I would have considered a federal fiat

Per. ch
wording
OK
fine?

demanding, for instance, the abolition of social segregation ^a against the general peace and welfare; and because I would have considered a federal order of that kind in the Nazi dictatorial pattern rather than in the slower, more painful, but sounder pattern of the democratic process....

"...There is no power in the world ^h not even in all the mechanized armies of the earth, Allied and Axis ^h that could now force the Southern white people to ^e ^{the} abandonment of the principle of social segregation."

the?
see v
p. 230

That last statement was meant as a warning to the Negro leaders and those Negro editors who were demanding "All or nothing" for their cooperation in the war effort. They were giving the Committee almost as much trouble as the frightened whites. With all the persuasive power ^h possessed he tried to point out to them the error of their ways: ²

new in
as in
many
other
instances
ch
throughout

"Too many of the [Negro] leaders have professed to see in Executive Order 8802 a new 'Emancipation Proclamation' and have magnified its import and its possibilities:

"Too many of them ignore the history and tradition of this section and take refuge in the wholly unrealistic idea that the federal power can be invoked to

perform some magic to convert human nature from what it is. We ought to have sense enough by now to know that the Federal government has only such power as we freely accord it; our experiment with Prohibition should have taught us that, a federal enactment is effective only as it conforms to the will of the people and as they respect it.

"The Negro must realize that, although it is slower and more painful to him, the educational process, coupled with economic security and the implementation of his civil rights, is the only sure cure in the long run for our national ills.

"Democracy is not a perfected state of Utopian government; its strength lies in the fact that it has at least the disposition to continue to attack its ^{ills.} ~~ills.~~ The educational process and its accoutrements bring a more intelligent approach and an awakened sense of justice on the part of the white man, without which the Southern Negro cannot ever advance much. The Southern Negro cannot afford ^{to} ~~to~~ drive from his side, in his march to a greater fulfillment of his rights, the Southern white men of good will who have been his chief ^e ~~asset~~ asset and his chief aid."

Angry denunciation from Negro leaders throughout the country stormed around Mark's well-meaning

on p. 230

well - -
Meaning
Read "
OK ?
see 1st
ed p. 230

head. After all, he was not a liberal, they
cried, "He was just another Negro-hating
Mississippian."

Mixed with the criticisms, were a few kind
^{words}
~~lines~~ from white editors. The kindest were written
by John Temple Graves, ~~an~~ editor of the Birmingham
Age Herald and a widely syndicated liberal columnist.
Quoting what he described as Mark's "now famous
statement," that the Southern Negro could not
afford to drive from his side...the Southern white
~~men~~
~~men~~ of good will..." and his "historic declaration"
that "There is no power in the world...that could now
force ~~the Southern~~ white people to the abandonment of the
principle of social segregation," John said,

"Mr. Ethridge was speaking of a fact. He was
passing no judgment, simply stating a truth without
recognition of which there can be no practical
approach now to the very real problems and needs
of the Negro in the South. A New Dealer...and
member of the President's Fair Employment Practice
Committee, he found it necessary, as a man accustomed
to getting things accomplished, to make this statement
of fact. Much as the statement disappointed some
of his liberal friends in other parts of the country
and ~~angry~~ ^{angry} as it made the national Negro leaders,
it disappointed and angered even more the reaction-
aries in the South who are looking to gathering
racial tensions as a shining chance for discrediting
not only the New Deal but the whole liberal position..."

"lines ok
or words?"

~~From
on
p. 228~~

X

see p. 228

pretty
long
here,
ok?

✓ To have Southern liberals like Mark Ethridge and
 ✓ Virginius Laney ^{Editor of the Richmond (Va) Times Dispatch} taking forthright stands against
 agitation for the settlement of the whole Negro
 problem overnight...even as they lead in demands
 for the Negro's full participation in the industrial
 and military tasks of the war, has been confusing
 to the Talmadges of Dixie, to the Fascists, to the ^{cap?}
 Klansmen who are itching so to ride, and to those
 gentlemen who took it upon themselves recently
 to use the club on a great Negro singer [Roland
 ✓ Hayes] in Rome, Georgia, who had nothing but peace
 and good will in his heart."

In Mark's thank-you letter to John he said he
 appreciated his "reading^s to defend" him ^{and} then
 added ^{that} he had to spend a lot of time defend^eing himself,
 partly, he supposed, because, like Popeye "I yam
 what I yam..."

Mark's troubles were insignificant compared to the
 troubles that piled up for the Committee. The President's
 support was practically non^existent. He bowed to the protests
 of the Committee's opponents, the Southern congressmen, the
 industrial leaders, the labor unions, whose cooperation he
 needed to wage a successful war. He shifted the Committee
 from agency to agency. At first it was in the Labor Division
 of the Office of Productive Management (OPM), but when the
 OPM was abolished in January, 1942, the President moved to
 Committee to the War Production Board; then in July, 1942,
 he moved it to the War Manpower Commission, where it was
 subject to the orders of the WMPC chairman, Paul McNutt.

Ethridge

224
p- ~~221~~ -b

There was constant bickering between the Committee and ^{the Office of Production Management} ~~(OPM)~~. The Committee was demoralized. Three members resigned. Finally in May, 1943, it gave way to its successor ¹/₂ the ~~xxx~~ ^{Second}/_{2nd} Fair Employment Practice Committee. Mark was not a member.

xxx