

YTS, RACIAL EQUALITY AND THE TRADE UNIONS

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The recent history of trade unions and race

The recent history of the treatment of black workers in Britain by the TUC and the other movement has been well documented elsewhere (e.g. Radin, 1966; Smith, 1974;

There has now been enough research evidence accumulated to demonstrate convincingly that racial inequalities in the labour market are perpetuated in the operation of YTS. (For example, see Fenton et al, 1984; CRE, 1984; Pollert, 1985; Cross, 1986.)¹ The commitment of the Manpower Services Commission to equal opportunity has been shown to be weak in practice, and notwithstanding the efforts of a few individual schemes which hold equal opportunity high on their own agendas, there is little evidence that routine racial discrimination is being challenged in the daily operation of YTS.

At one level it might be considered that trade unions have had an opportunity to be directly involved in the furtherance of equal opportunity on YTS. The MSC is a tripartite body involving representatives of government, employers and trade unions, and from the outset of the Scheme pronouncements have been made from the top on the importance of racial equality. At the beginning of YTS the MSC's Youth Task Group stated that YTS should provide "positive opportunities for disadvantaged groups"; since then there have been regular policy statements on the importance of equality between ethnic groups. Thus the MSC has apparently been aware of this particular need from the start, and trade union representatives, who have been involved from the beginning at different levels in YTS, should in theory have been able to make an input on a whole range of issues, including that of equal opportunity. At the national level there are TUC representatives on the Youth Training Board and at local level there are five trade union representatives on Area Manpower Boards (AMBs) along with representatives of the CBI, local authorities and others. The AMB has the power to reject individual schemes or argue for changes within them, and in theory these changes could relate to good practice in the area of equal opportunity.

However, there are a number of reasons why successful union-backed action on equal opportunity and anti-racism has not been marked on YTS. For one thing, it is a fact that even at the best of times trade unions have traditionally put a rather low priority on equal opportunity and anti-racist action. (The misgivings that have been voiced over YTS at a local union level are more likely to have been on issues of job substitution and cheap labour, which are more traditional areas of trade union concern, rather than equal opportunity and anti-racism). And for another it has worked out that union power and influence over the content and practice of YTS is much less than might originally have been thought.

The recent history of trade unions and race

The rather sorry history of the treatment of black workers in Britain by the TUC and the labour movement has been well documented elsewhere (e.g. Radin, 1966; Smith, 1974;

Phizacklea and Miles, 1980; McIlroy, 1982; GLC, 1984; Fryer, 1984; Wrench, 1986). It might be useful at this stage just to remind ourselves of some of the details of the post war trade union response to black workers, so as to put in a broader context the specific problem of equal opportunity on YTS. Some of the main failings of the trade union movement with regard to its black membership can be summarised as follows: (Wrench, 1986).

1. The failure of the national trade union leadership to entertain the idea that black members were faced with any different problems from those of the ordinary white membership, or that this necessitated any special policies.
2. Cases of direct and active collusion of local shop stewards and officials in arrangements of discrimination. (In addition to this, in some notorious cases, the union withheld support from striking black workers who were protesting about this adverse treatment in relation to white workers).
3. Cases of more passive collusion of union officers and shop stewards in practices which were demonstrated to have been discriminatory in outcome, along with a resistance to change these practices.
4. Individual cases of racism by unsympathetic, unenlightened or even racially-bigoted shop stewards and local officials, and a reluctance on the part of unions to take disciplinary action against racist offenders.
5. A general lack of awareness of the issues of race and equal opportunity and the particular circumstances of ethnic minority members, which may not manifest itself as racism but in effect lessens the participation of black members in the union.

In recent times, with the decline in the worst excesses of openly racist practices by trade unions - strikes against the employment of black co-workers, conference motions calling for bans on the recruitment of black people, and so on - white trade unionists have argued that the 'bad old days' of racial prejudice and discrimination are gone. However, this verdict is premature. Individual cases of crude racial exclusion still occasionally come to light, such as the 'BL Cars' case when AUEW shop stewards were accessories to the racist rejection of the application of a black fitter (CRE, 1981).

Just as effective as active racism is the more passive collusion of union officers in long established practices which are discriminatory in their effects, such as restricting recruitment to the family of existing employees and relying on word of mouth dissemination of information on vacancies. These and other practices, often the result of

an agreement between unions and management, were shown to explain why it was that of school leavers who (realistically) aspired to craft apprenticeships, only 13% of Asian and 15% of Afro-Caribbean boys were successful, compared to 44% of white boys (Lee and Wrench, 1983,61). Even if such practices did not have a racist intent in their origin, they clearly have a racist effect now, and it has been argued that since the passing of the 1976 Race Relations Act these more 'discreet' forms of racial exclusion have increased in significance.

These are also factors at work which make it much less likely that the views of black workers are heard and their interests represented in the day-to-day business of the union. Black trade union members remain under-represented in union posts: the Policy Studies Institute survey found that black members are much less likely to hold an elected post than white members, even though they are more likely to join unions than white people, and attend meetings with about the same frequency (Brown, 1984, 170). Another survey concluded that an awareness by black members of racial discrimination and racism at the place of work and within the union was a factor in explaining the lower level of black participation in workplace union activity (Phizacklea and Miles, 1980, 125).

In a survey on trade unionism and race carried out in the West Midlands in 1984 black union members reported a lack of confidence in trade unions to look after their interests. They saw trade unions as only willing to take the problems of black workers seriously if they were also faced by white workers - rather than issues such as racial discrimination, under-representation in certain areas of work, promotion, the differential impact of redundancies, or racial abuse. Many union officers retained a 'colour blind' perspective and felt that giving any special attention to the grievances of black workers was to give them "two bites at the cherry" (Lee, 1984, 12).

A report in 1985 on black workers' participation in unions in Lancashire documented a number of practices by white workers which led to the under-representation of black workers in the local union organisation, and identified particular union policies and structures which in their effects ran counter to formal union policies on equal opportunity (CRE, 1985). And there is much evidence to show that even at a formal level equal opportunity is still seen as relatively low priority by many trade unions. A survey by the GLC's working group on this area found that although there were some encouraging "signs and symbols of commitment to combatting racism" from a number of unions, many others still felt it unnecessary to declare their opposition to racism. They felt that equal opportunity had always existed in their own organisation, and several unions stated that they had not implemented provisions to combat racism because it was unnecessary. (GLC Anti Racist Trade Union Working Group, 1984).

The recent evidence of the poor record of trade unions on racial issues, the lack of an effective voice for black members in union policies, and the low priority given to equal opportunity policies and anti-racism suggest that one cannot automatically expect a strong stand position from unions on racial equality now that YTS has arrived. The connivance of active trade unionists in discriminatory recruitment practices up to 1983 does not auger well for positive action now that YTS has come to be the main avenue for school-leaver recruitment into "employment". Despite the strong pronouncements on equal opportunity at TUC and YTB level, it should not be taken for granted that they will make any difference to the routine operations of YTS.

Trade unions and YTS: A peripheral concern?

If it is true that many trade unions have a less than conspicuous tradition of action on racial equality, it is also true that many unions have not made action on YTS a priority either. The Labour Research Department concluded from their own survey that for many trade unionists YTS was "not a major bargaining issue," perhaps because of the fact that there are still fewer 16-17 year olds on YTS than in full time education (Bargaining Report, June 1985). However, even where the motivation to act on YTS is strong, unions are finding it hard to perform their traditional roles for trainees. The way that YTS has been set up and operated makes union organisation difficult: trade unions do not have adequate resources to cope with the new demands of YTS and it has proved impossible for even the most committed and active trade unionists to monitor adequately the individual schemes. These difficulties are compounded by the persisting attitude of ambivalence within the trade union movement towards the scheme, with vocal sections of members in most unions calling for a total withdrawal of co-operation with YTS. Then there is the fact that the operation of YTS fosters competition between unions according to their differing interests, and also raises difficulties and confusions over the recruitment of trainees into union membership. And finally, there is the fact that some unions members involved in the running of YTS are wittingly or unwittingly compromised in the racism which is continuing through the Scheme. All this makes it more difficult for there to exist concerted union action to pressure managing agents, sponsors and MSC officials to take seriously their responsibilities on equal opportunity.

The limitations of union power in YTS

For a trade unionist concerned with attempts to improve YTS, the key difficulty is that of lack of power. Under YTS, for a number of reasons, unions are finding it difficult to make their influence felt. Originally the TUC had given its support to YTS on the

understanding that unions would be able to monitor schemes for quality and have the right to recruit trainees. As the GLC warned at the outset of the Scheme in 1983

"If trade unions are limited to a consultation role and young people are deterred from seeking membership then the TUC and local trade unions may become more critical of YTS." (GLC, 1983, 11)

Yet despite the growing misgivings among local trade unionists about the power of the MSC, the operation of YTS and their role in it, the TUC remains surprisingly uncritical.

Eversley shows how continuing TUC loyalty to the MSC and YTS can be understood in the context of the MSC's early history. The MSC was set up in 1974, with the TUC playing a significant role in its creation, in the belief that it could become something that the TUC has long desired - "a strong centralised labour market planning agency". Eversley describes how commitment to MSC tripartism was considerably strengthened during the Social Contract period of the Callaghan Labour government, so that when the Conservative government gained power in 1979 the first reaction of the TUC had been to rush to defend the MSC, in fear that Tory backbench pressure would lead to its abolition. This helps to explain why, at TUC level, criticisms of the MSC and YTS are still somewhat muted. As Bill Keys of the TUC General Council put it at the 1983 Congress "the MSC was the concept of the Congress and indeed we fought for it and we got it" The predecessor of YTS - YOP - was itself begun through TUC pressure on the Labour government, and thus the TUC finds it difficult to criticise schemes like YTS which have evolved out of earlier schemes initiated by the TUC itself (Eversley, 1986).

Continuing TUC endorsement of YTS in the context of a growing disillusion amongst trade unionists who had been willing to give it a try (along with cries of 'I told you so' from those who had opposed it from the start) has led to what could be called at best an 'ambivalence' to YTS by the trade union movement. At a time when fundamental questions such as "Should the TUC withdraw all YTS co-operation?" are being asked, the finer points of equal opportunity practice get neglected. In the context of arguments as to whether to abandon ship altogether, discussions about equitable distribution of cabin space are made to seem less important.

By early 1984 there was already a great deal of disquiet and disillusion among trade union representatives on AMBs, and also at the level of the YTB, where government ministers had been consistently disregarding the recommendations of the Board.

At both levels members are saying that they find themselves powerless to resist Government directions to the MSC which are changing the character of the YTS and its objectives and that their boards are in danger of becoming rubber stamps for policies that they believe are wrong" (Times Educational Supplement, 16 March 1984).

In theory the trade union representatives on AMB's can call for the rejection of unsatisfactory schemes. This monitoring role should have been crucially important, and yet in practice there is no chance at all that schemes can be adequately monitored by trade union representatives. For one thing a significant proportion of schemes in any one area may not even come under the scrutiny of a local board. Schemes under the Large Companies Unit are agreed nationally - 50 percent of the schemes in the North West, for example, come under the Large Companies Unit and do not go through the Cheshire AMB.² Yet in terms of equal opportunity perhaps the Large Companies Unit schemes deserve a critical local scrutiny as there appear to be suspiciously low numbers of black trainees in these schemes (CRE 1984; Pollert, 1985). It has been difficult for representatives to be able to monitor effectively the quality of schemes even in those industries which are trade union organised. Yet under YTS there has been large scale placing of trainees in small numbers in small outlets where there is no trade union organisation at all. It is impossible for trade union representatives to monitor these non-unionised environments and yet it is precisely these workplaces where the most serious abuses under YTS, including racial abuse, are most likely to occur.

The proportion of unionisation varies between type of scheme and between geographical area: for example, it is estimated that in Glasgow Central area around 60% of places are in unionised workplaces, whereas the corresponding estimate for the North East London area is only 5%.³ Unionisation is likely to be low where training is privatised: in the Birmingham/Solihull area there is a particularly large proportion of private training agencies in YTS, overshadowing genuine employer based training (BTURC, 1986, 17). The West Midlands YTS monitoring project estimate that 87% of PTAs have no union structure within their organisation, and that only a very few place their trainees in unionised work environments. They conclude that "the degree of trade union involvement on YTS in Birmingham/Solihull is ridiculously low" (BTURC, 1986, 44).

On some AMB's, members have delegated responsibility for scheme approval to MSC officials in those cases where only a small number of places are involved, and thus trade union representatives never see these schemes (Allum & Quigley, 1983, 16). Trade union representatives are not able to monitor adequately schemes even for the most tangible and traditional trade union issues such as job substitution, cheap labour or health and safety. Even less are they likely to show an active policing interest on abuses of equal

opportunity and infringement of the Race Relations Act. Even committed trade unionists are daunted by the workload. In 1984 a TGWU representative wrote that resignation by trade union representatives from Area Manpower Boards is increasing because of the volume of work, as trade union involvement in MSC work is on top of the normal industrial workload.⁴ Furthermore, AMB members are frequently rather ignorant in terms of the operation of racism, the needs of equal opportunity and the law. As one trade union representative to a Midlands AMB complained "if you ask the AMB what is the difference between direct and indirect discrimination they couldn't tell you".⁵

The call for a boycott

The experiences of the first years of YTS and the sense of powerlessness and frustration felt by trade unionists have led to serious questioning of the wisdom of continuing TUC involvement. At the 1984 Trades Union Congress there was a strong lobby for withdrawal of cooperation in YTS. As it was, the 1984 Congress voted to continue to support the scheme whilst also seeking improvements in it, and adopted a joint TUC/Labour party paper on alternatives to YTS. In reviewing this debate and others at individual union conferences it was concluded that most delegates were critical of the scheme but were split on the action to take (Labour Research, October 1984) as a result. The two positions were summarised as follows:

Argument 1

"YTS in its present form is a government inspired cheap labour scheme which both exploits trainees and threatens the conditions of permanent staff: unions should therefore withdraw support unless the rate for the job is paid, with a guaranteed job at the end of 12 months."

Argument 2

"Union withdrawal from YTS would leave trainees unprotected and removed from contact with the union movement: unions should stay in and fight to win improvements."

The latter arguments prevailed, with many trade unionists arguing that trade unions have a responsibility to help those on the scheme over abuses of cheap labour, racial and sexual discrimination, and so on.

Those trade unionists who argued for withdrawal did not see this strategy as "abandoning youth", as they argued that the TUC had very little influence on the Scheme anyway. It was argued that withdrawal

"will in fact strengthen the position of young people because they will be brought into the same fight for jobs etc. as their friends and parents, in the

same way that the miners' strike has sharpened the contradictions and involved the youth. To follow through the logic of the "abandonment of the youth" argument would mean concluding that the miners have abandoned the youth by contributing to the economic collapse of Britain!"⁶

In fact the "all or nothing" division on whether or not to withdraw from YTS is somewhat misleading: there are a number of alternative levels of action possible. For example, one suggestion, less extreme than a total boycott, is that the TUC should withdraw its blanket legitimisation of YTS by removing its representatives from the YTB and AMBs, whilst retaining the option of giving union approval to selected good individual schemes (Eversley, 1986). This would constitute a shift from the current TUC stance, much criticised by rank and file trade unionists, which is in effect "all schemes are good until proven bad" to a position where a scheme has to be demonstrated to be acceptable according to a number of criteria before union endorsement is given. One of these criteria would be good equal opportunity practice. Of course, the dilemma of the 'total boycott' position for many trade union activists of the left is that they find it more difficult to organise effectively for equal opportunity action on YTS whilst simultaneously arguing for a withdrawal of cooperation with the Scheme.

Another factor which militates against concerted trade union action on equal opportunity on YTS is the fact that the very structure of the Scheme has encouraged divisions among unions with different interests. Strongly opposed to YTS are unions like the NGA who called at the 1983 Trades Union Congress for the TUC to reconsider its involvement, labelling YTS a "disgraceful con-trick". The problem is that many unions such as NUT, NALGO, NATHFE and the Civil Service Union have thousands of members whose jobs are now dependent on YTS, which is one reason why arguments for continued cooperation with YTS prevailed. At the 1983 Congress the Civil Service Union opposed the NGA's stance with the argument that trade union members of the MSC should "be supported in trying to change things from within" (Times Higher Education Supplement, 2 September 1983, 9 September 1983).

A number of unions have adopted what has been called a 'conditional approval' approach, who are, as Eversley points out, generally those unions which lack a tradition of developing training policy, or which organise such a diverse range of workers as to make a general policy response impossible. Among the unions taking this view are GMBATU, NUPE, USDAW, TGWU and ASTMS (Eversley, 1986).

Within those unions which are inevitably closely involved with YTS, many trade unionists attempt to maintain an actively critical position which at the same time does not penalise unfairly the young people, or leave them stranded without any potential for

organisation or hope of improvement in their situation. As one NATFHE member of an AMB put it:

"You oppose YTS in the sense that you oppose the eleven plus. You argue and fight for a different system but you don't actually refuse to teach the kids".⁷

Difficulties in the recruitment of trainees

YTS has created problems for the unions on the question of the recruitment of trainees. It is difficult for unions to look after the interests of black trainees on schemes if trainees in general are not members of the unions. Organisation of trainees is difficult: their work experience is likely to take place in sectors of the economy which have proven resistant to unionisation. For example, people on YTS are more than twice as likely as the rest of the workforce to be found in the 'distribution, hotels, catering and repairs' sector of the economy which includes work in shops, warehouses, restaurants and garages, all difficult for unions to organise (Bargaining Report, June 1985). What is more, this distribution puts the bulk of the organising of trainees into the hands of the TGWU, GMBATU and USDAW, all of whom, it could be argued, have lagged behind many other unions as far as progressive initiatives on race and equal opportunity are concerned. Trainees often work as single individuals in small firms - the Labour Research Department quotes MSC figures which show that where work experience training is done "in-house" the average size of the workforce is 94, whereas when trainees are placed with other employers for their work experience, most of these employers will have workforces of less than 25 people (Bargaining Report, June 1985). Trainees spend less than a year in a particular sector and are then gone, perhaps to unemployment or perhaps to a job where they could be represented by a different union to the one where they did the training. There is sometimes considerable uncertainty about which is the appropriate union to join. Furthermore, most trainees will spend a quarter of their time in a college, which suggests that membership of the NUS, too, would be useful in order for them to get student benefits and full access to college activities. Some Mode 'A' trainees, however, will not go to college at all, but will spend their time in the company's own training school.⁸

The workplace unions have some difficulty in coping with individuals with 'trainee' rather than 'employee' status through their normal channels. "Most unions are not structured to even recruit trainees, never mind involve them or look after their interests".⁹ NUS officers also acknowledge that F E student unions have considerable difficulties in

representing trainees.¹⁰ Unions are becoming aware of these problems and some are attempting to modify their procedures to take account of these new arrivals.

Even if unions are geared up to the enormous task of recruiting YTS trainees there is the important question of whether trainees themselves actually desire to join unions. Many trainees do not see the benefits of trade union membership, and those who are isolated in small numbers may regard union membership as a liability, rendering them vulnerable to victimisation. Others may be particularly cautious when in competition with their peers for a job with the managing agent at the end of the training period.

Institutional structures are arrayed consistently and powerfully against collective action by young people. This is exemplified in an acute form by the position of young people in the YTS: very little is negotiable - length of stay in training, type of training, rate of allowance, access to certificated courses, safety standards are constrained by the mesh of managing agents, sponsors, colleges, careers officers and schools, overseen by MSC, which promotes and sustains YTS.

Not surprising, then, that examples of YTS trainees successfully joining together to negotiate and fight for changes in their conditions of training, or in the training itself, are comparatively few. The chance for young people to challenge what is being handed out and change it is not given to them, and, as yet, few take it.¹¹

Despite the fact that most unions allow trainees in at much lower membership rates there has been relatively little success in recruitment terms. It cannot be automatically assumed by unions that these young people, new to the world of "employment", are convinced of the value of union membership, even though they may be thoroughly disillusioned with their conditions and circumstances on YTS. Tower Hamlets Youth Unemployment Project reported to the Labour Movement National Inquiry into youth unemployment and training in March 1985 that there was "a lot of anger in the community" over YTS - however neither the Labour Party nor the trade unions were ever mentioned as agents for campaigning against YTS in changing the situation."

Similarly it was reported that in a ballot of 348 fourteen to eighteen year olds by Preston Trades Council nearly two-thirds replied no to the question 'do trade unions help solve trainees' problems at work?' (Labour Research, October 1984).

The style and content of union publicity and recruitment material is often appallingly ill-suited to young workers in general, still less is it seen as relevant by black young people. As one exasperated activist put it, talks on the Tolpuddle martyrs, the General Strike and the need to defeat the Tory government simply alienate black 16 year olds.¹² Instead unions need to recognise the kinds of issues which will hold some relevance for

black young people, such as police harassment, anti-deportation campaigns, and anti-racism strategies as well as the issues of low pay and the exploitation of young people on MSC schemes.

Occurrences of racism on YTS

Racial discrimination is often camouflaged and insidious, and difficult to identify in its operation. Yet even when it is clearly recognised and felt by trainees they may not be motivated to do anything about it because of their own isolation, vulnerability or inexperience. Nevertheless, reports of racism on YTS have been accumulating over the years (Pollert, 1985). One area of concern for unions is that they may have members employed on YTS as trainers and lecturers who are pressured to participate in, or turn a blind eye to, racist practices. These are also likely to be those unions with no interest in trainees as members. If a scheme is attacked or investigated for contravention of the Race Relations Act the initial local trade union response could well be to defend their own members' rather than the trainees' interests.

" few full time officials are willing to withdraw support from schemes where members are involved. The result of this is that the trainees get the raw deal. One local AMB trade union member confided that he didn't "give a f... about the kids" if protection of members in supervisory positions was threatened"¹³

This is not to suggest that unions will inevitably respond negatively to exposures of transgressions by their members. In 1984 the Birmingham CRE began to investigate FE colleges in Birmingham over alleged racial discrimination involving staff who were NATFHE members. College lecturers had admitted that on a number of occasions in order to get the work experience placements that they needed, they had tolerated and cooperated with the racial preferences expressed by placement providers. For example, in one college the head of a Mode 'A' YTS Unit reported that instructions had been received and accepted from the proprietors of four small shops who had said that black trainees would harm their trade with white pensioners. The reaction of the Birmingham Liaison Committee of NATFHE was not a 'defensive' one: instead they circulated a special newsletter to their members agreeing that the incidents investigated by the CRE probably represented "part of a much larger problem", emphasising the union's commitment to pursue racial equality and fight racism, and urging that every NATFHE branch in Birmingham should discuss racism and discrimination at its next branch meeting. Furthermore, it was pressure from NATFHE which helped to end the practice of keeping information about discrimination "in house" between the MSC and the Careers

Service, and to replace this by a report procedure from the colleges and the Careers Service to the CRE (Pollert, 1985, 13).

The TUC and the MSC

One fundamental problem in the area of equal opportunity, YTS and the unions, is the often different ways that the issues are perceived by the TUC, by local full time officials and by white and black grass roots activists.

As argued earlier, the TUC has been closely associated with the MSC since the latter's creation, and has played an active role in the framing of many of its policies. It has already been demonstrated by previous research that there exist policy makers within the MSC who exhibit confusion between the concept of disadvantage through having 'special needs', and the inequalities in life chances caused by the experience of racial discrimination by young black people, who do not otherwise have 'special needs'. A survey into the experience of ethnic minority young people on YOP, the predecessor of YTS, which included an interview programme with MSC staff, led the authors to observe:

We have been appalled to see just how many times black and Asian youngsters are bracketed with the handicapped and afflicted. How on earth can groups or normal young people -with all the range of human talents and diversities- develop their potential when they are continually referred to as having 'special needs' analogous to the physically and mentally handicapped, the educationally disadvantaged and the ex-offenders." (Cross et al, 1983, 32)

The Bristol University study of the first year of operation of YTS concluded that in many cases the only 'special need' of black young people is for the colour of their skin not to influence their access to training and labour market opportunities. (Fenton et al, 1984, 5).

The problem is that the close association of the TUC with the MSC has led many trade union activists and black trade unionists to be suspicious of the TUC stance on equal opportunity. In the eyes of many people the TUC has become contaminated with the racial ideologies of the state, whether with the implicit view of 'special needs' that has emerged in many MSC policies, or with the appearance that policies are guided more by a desire to keep young black people off the streets rather than by a will to fight racism and institutional discrimination. The thinking of state agencies like the MSC has its origins in a concern for special measures to absorb the energy of 'alienated' black youth and deflect them away from criminal activity or riot (Solomos, 1983, 12). An International Labour Organisation Committee stated that

in many cases special measures for young people (are) also a way of protecting society against the dangers of idle and restless youngsters who could cause riots and voice strong criticisms of government and society. (ILO, 1978; quoted in Solomos, 1983, 13)

To the extent that the TUC, in its close links with the MSC, is also associated with this view, its pronouncements on equal opportunity measures are discredited in the eyes of black activists. Yet the TUC is in a sense losing both ways in that it is also low in credibility in the eyes of many white rank and file trade unionists in its still relatively uncritical support of YTS and the MSC. When the TUC emphasises the need for equal opportunity as an apparently important consideration in the unpopular YTS, this activity in itself becomes devalued among many grass roots trade unionists.

This takes place in the context of something of a gap between top and bottom in the unions: an individual union's national officers may well be supportive of the TUC's policies on YTS whilst the local union officials may be in opposition to it. And as Eversley writes, when the TUC acts to discourage and dampen criticism of the MSC, this creates confusion at a local level where the defects of schemes are obvious.

The anger and sense of "being conned" held by many trade unionists does not find its way into the debates at the annual TUC. Nor does it always find expression on the local tripartite Area Manpower Boards, where trade unionists sit to represent TUC policy rather than local feeling" (Eversley, 1986).

In its relationship with the MSC and YTS the TUC has ended up playing an almost 'managerial' role, and through its general endorsement of MSC activities it has in a sense given official labour movement 'legitimation' to all MSC schemes, no matter how poor they may be. Many trade unionists would prefer to see the TUC playing a different role:

"A more combative and open approach within which the TUC was willing publicly to criticise MSC would give a great boost to grass roots campaigns and to the beleaguered TUC representatives in local AMB's. It would also help to raise the stock of the labour movement in the eyes of those on MSC programmes" (Eversley, 1986).

In many cases trade unionists feel bitter over YTS and the TUC's collaboration with the MSC when it has meant the surrendering of what influence they had over recruitment and training. When, as part of the unpopular and obviously flawed YTS, trade unionists are informed of the importance of equal opportunity strategies, this is not the best environment for sympathetic acceptance of such activity. One trade union delegate to

the 1985 Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training spoke of the problems in general of such 'top down' exhortations to equal opportunity:

"... a lot of manual workers in particular begin to see that hard won bits of control that they have gained, like 'who becomes a supervisor', 'who allocates the overtime and bonus rotas'... which they have spent years, literally 20,30, 40 years trying to establish in terms of negotiating rights - they're now being told from the top "you've got to change it" and that leads to unfortunate consequences, which unions like my own are only beginning to recognise.....that equality is their fight, not a management imposition".

Of course, in those cases in the past when unions did succeed in maintaining a degree of control over the processes of recruitment there was often little evidence of a desire to assist the equal opportunities of black workers. The arrangements were more likely to be exclusionary and discriminatory in effect, such as those practised by craft unions when apprentices were taken on (Lee and Wrench, 1983).

Hope for improvement

Although the discussion so far has concerned itself with the problems and difficulties facing the labour movement, this should not obscure the fact that there is scope for genuine amelioration on YTS, and that there do exist opportunities within the current arrangements which can be exploited in the interests of greater equality of opportunity. Through the interventions of the MSC the government has involved itself in a centralised manipulation of the labour market, despite its alleged adherence to the ideology of the free market and the rejection of state interference. Through YTS they have scrapped many of the traditional individual training arrangements and imposed more standardisation across the country in the treatment of school leavers. One contradiction here is that the centralisation of this process through the MSC enables a degree of co-ordination in the response on equal opportunity issues in a way not possible when, for example, there existed more locally negotiated agreements which gave individual craft unions control over recruitment. Ever since the injustices of the perpetuation of race and gender inequalities on YTS started to become apparent there has been in reaction a mobilisation of organisations fighting for a fairer system: trade union resource centres, individual union working parties, local authority groups, academic researchers, women's groups and black groups, many of whom have formed links via the Sheffield based Labour Movement National Inquiry. The campaigning, the lobbying and the publications of such groups, as

well as those of the more established pressure groups such as Youthaid have, in fact, had an effect on the MSC.

At the local level there are cases where local MSCs have begun to monitor equal opportunity more effectively in direct response to the pressure put on them by trade union - related activist groups. And by late 1984 the MSC nationally had admitted that equal opportunity had not been given enough priority in the first years of the Scheme and needed to be improved. MSC documentation began to talk about giving greater prominence to the guidelines on equal opportunity and making clear the legal penalties of discrimination, as well as offering more support for employers who have a positive equal opportunities policy. The 1984 YTS Review recommends Area Manpower Boards to "review how they monitor the progress of equal opportunities within YTS locally" and trade union members can play a role in this. For example, in August 1984 the Birmingham and Solihull Area Manpower Board formed a Equal Opportunities Sub Committee largely as a result of the pressure by trade union representatives on the board (Mackney, 1985). An MSC paper prepared in May 1985 on the forthcoming 2 year YTS acknowledges many of the criticisms made on YTS so far and makes new proposals for improvements: for example, managing agents will in future be required to make an "explicit commitment" to national policies on equal opportunity (Labour Research, July 1985).

There have been other developments. More trade unions have been taking a stronger line on equal opportunity and anti-racism, and the practical support given to black workers in conflict, along with positive stances against racism, in a number of instances in the early 1980's forms an encouraging contrast with the situation in the early 1970's. There are also indications that more unions are recognising the need to give a greater priority to action on YTS. Although the Labour Research Department's 1985 survey concluded that YTS was only of "peripheral concern" to the unions, they were able to point to developments which were causing unions to alter their priorities. One of these is the recognition that YTS is now an established part of an employer's recruitment procedures, acting as a screening device for potential employees. MSC figures show that a majority of employers providing work experience use YTS in this way (Labour Research, July 1985). Another development which has moved YTS closer to traditional union concerns is its increasing incorporation into existing apprenticeships and long term training programmes. (Bargaining Report, June 1985).

Varieties of union activity on equality in YTS

Because of the understandable ambivalence within the labour movement towards YTS there is the danger that racial and gender inequalities are seized upon as yet more reasons to justify the complete abandonment of any formal trade union co-operation with YTS. This would be a pity, as a withdrawal of labour movement and union scrutiny would allow racial inequality to consolidate unchallenged in the routine procedures of the Scheme. If there is one lesson that the labour movement should have learned about racism, in both its personal and institutional forms, it is that racism thrives on inactivity and will consolidate itself in the absence of constant effort to identify and oppose it. To leave the running of the Scheme entirely in the hands of officials who are inevitably preoccupied with various criteria of 'efficiency' is to provide through inertia an environment where racial inequality will flourish.

Finn has argued

"A boycott (of YTS) could easily be understood as an attempt to defend what already exists - a racist and sexist apprenticeship system and an elitist structure of education. It would offer little to the workers and activists involved in MSC schemes or to young people who have no other options." (Finn, 1984, 23-24)

To work within YTS to bring about changes is not to demonstrate an uncritical 'acceptance' of these particular training arrangements. There is no contradiction in trade unionists campaigning in the long term for alternative structures of training, whilst at the same time working to reduce the inequalities and injustices within YTS in its current form. Within an organisation the latter activity would involve trade unionists keeping an eye on the recruitment procedures of managing agents to identify whether black candidates are being excluded from certain schemes, checking whether they are concentrated in "less desirable" areas within schemes, and watching for any signs of dubious arrangements between managing agents and sponsors in trainee work placements, an area where crude and direct racial discrimination is reportedly widespread but which is difficult for parties outside the organisation - the MSC, the CRE, the Careers Service - to spot. It might also involve the policing of any cases of racial abuse and harassment from union members of black trainees during their work experience and watching for suspicious racial imbalance amongst those trainees offered work at the end of their training.

Broader activity would involve organising trainees and trainers into unions, keeping YTS on the agendas of union meetings, lobbying local AMB members, using the publicity of demonstrations and publications to put pressure on the MSC, and so on. It goes without saying that any action on racial inequality should involve as much as possible black union members and trainees, and that those unions which possess black sections should facilitate their particular role in this. The problem with union representation of black interests on YTS is that representatives are generally white: there are often ethnic minority representatives on AMBs but these tend to have co-opted status, without full voting rights. In May 1984 only one AMB out of the 55 nationwide contained an ethnic minority voting member (Youthaid, 1985). More often it will fall to white trade union representatives on the board to represent the interests of black members. Black trade unionists are under-represented in the sorts of union positions which could make them eligible for AMB membership, for all the reasons discussed earlier and it might be argued that this is one clear example of the advantage of having black sections within unions which could provide their own representatives to monitor the interests of black members and trainees on such bodies.

The benefits for unions of equal opportunity action

Many black young people are cynical about YTS, as they have been in the past about all those 'special measures' which have been guided so often by a view of 'special needs' and have little to do with proper quality training, gaining 'real' jobs or countering the racism which accounts for so much of their occupational disadvantage. Yet at the same time young people in general seem to have little faith in trade unions as a vehicle to improve their position on YTS. For black young people in particular, trade unions must seem even less relevant to their needs, particularly when they see most local union hierarchies to consist only of white middle aged males.

Accepting the point made earlier that intervention in YTS is difficult, there are nevertheless advantages for trade unions making serious attempts to assist the equal treatment of black young people in their recruitment on to YTS, in their experiences during the scheme, and in their access to jobs after the training is over. Such activity will increase the likelihood of black young people coming to see union membership as at least worthy of consideration.

It should be remembered that something like one quarter of all black union members in this country are concentrated in one union - the TGWU - and that these black members are disproportionately located in retailing, distribution, passenger transport, catering, and other sectors where large numbers of YTS trainees are found. The potential for

unionisation of trainees must be enhanced by the presence of black union members around them - but only if the union itself is shown to be responding to the particular needs of its black membership. The potential is there - as yet little indication has been given that the union has recognised it.

It is equally important for unions to recruit YTS trainers as well as trainees, not least because young peoples' antipathy to unions may be reinforced by the supervisors' own ignorance of union issues. And similarly, unions must demonstrate to black supervisors the value of membership for them: previous union failings on race issues can only have been an impediment to this. For example, the Birmingham Liaison Committee of NATFHE has had a reasonably successful campaign to recruit YTS supervisors, but suffered initially from a reluctance by black supervisors to come to recruitment meetings because, as some supervisors reported, they had 'read about the Fernandes affair' and could 'see no point in joining a union which failed to stand up for black teachers and anti-racists'. (Mackney, 1985, 13).

If unions visibly involve themselves locally in the workplace concerns of black trainees and supervisors, and nationally through campaigns to encourage the MSC to put more pressure on managing agents and sponsors and devote more of its resources to equal opportunity, then this will at least give black people some evidence of union activity in their interests. Black workers have long been above-average in their willingness to support and join unions. If, at a time of falling union membership, unions are seriously expecting to continue to attract black members, then as far as the 16-18 age group goes, the pool of YTS trainees is the only arena open to their attention. The numbers of black young people of this age group found in genuine employment is negligible.

In all this activity there is no need to lose sight of the major faults that will continue to characterise YTS at a more fundamental level. There is the contradiction in the claim that YTS is about 'quality training' when part of the package is the systematic and savage reduction of wages and the transformation of young people into a cheap labour workforce. There is the contradiction in the assertion that the government, via the MSC, is displaying a concern for equal opportunity on YTS whilst at the same time it is magnifying the structures of massive inequality in British society by its policies in other spheres. Such fundamental contradictions will continue to exist regardless of the gains which are made from trade union action: this does not render less necessary or useful the day-by-day achievements gained in the fight for equality in schemes. And as well as campaigning on the weaknesses and injustices within YTS in its current form, unions have a role in showing the way to the alternatives. There do exist examples which can be quoted of schemes created with the assistance of local trade unions in local authorities

providing quality training linked to jobs in an environment of active concern with equal opportunity. (See Appendix 2).

If, despite all the agitation and activity, the research evidence, and the pressure of trade union and public opinion, it remains that the government and the MSC are still not able to produce a fairer set of arrangements for training young people, then this will further reinforce the conclusion that from the start the whole Scheme has been designed for the immediate convenience of employers who care little about equality, and for a government whose primary concerns are the erosion of trade union influence, the provision of cheap labour, and to keep young people off the streets. It will demonstrate that in its current form YTS is incapable of responding to genuine demands for greater equality in its operation, and will be one more reason for the eventual scrapping of the Scheme and its replacement by something which is capable of reflecting the needs of a multiracial society.

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Footnotes

1. Much of the same can be said for inequalities of gender on YTS - see Fawcet Society 1985, Thorpe 1984.
2. Report to the Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, June 1984.
3. Estimates from regional representatives to the Labour Movement National Inquiry, 1985.
4. Report to the Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, from a Manchester TGWU representative, 1984.
5. Taken from a personal interview.
6. Report to the Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training from Nottingham Trades Council Youth Action Group, 1985.
7. Personal communication.
8. It seems that Mode 'A' schemes have been less likely to have trainees unionised than Mode 'B'. Only those trainees in the large, already unionised, private sector Mode 'A' employers are likely to be unionised themselves. Trainees in Mode 'A' schemes are often dispersed in small firms which are difficult for unions to monitor. Others on Mode 'A' will not even have contact with NATHFE trainers as some Mode 'A' employers use their own regular staff to do the training. By contrast in some Mode 'B' schemes run by progressive local authorities the council will actually encourage trainees to join unions arguing that YTS ought to be introducing them to trade unions as part of their introduction to working life.
9. Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, Bulletin 3, 1985 p.18.
10. Leicestershire Area Committee of the NUS "The Youth Training Scheme: Problems and Issues in Leicestershire", 1983.
11. Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, Bulletin, 3, 1985 p.10.
12. Personal communication.
13. Labour Movement National Inquiry into Youth Unemployment and Training, Bulletin 3, 1985 p.10.

Appendix 1

The following summary of the Birmingham and Solihull Area Manpower Board Policy Statement on the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity and the Elimination of Discrimination on MSC Schemes is taken from Mackney, 1985.

The main provisions of the Policy Statement are as follows:

1. It attempts to cover all MSC schemes (not just YTS) and lay down guidelines to eliminate discrimination on such grounds as race, religion, sex, marital status or disability, and to promote equality of opportunity.
2. It notes that some aspects of MSC schemes will be beyond Area Board or Area Office control because the decisions are taken elsewhere, but determines that the AMB will inform the appropriate body where it feels a practice or procedure is discriminatory in effect (e.g. criteria for entitlement to go on a Community Programme discriminate against married women).
3. The AMB and Area Office are required to:
 - issue an annual report on implementation of equal opportunities policy;
 - examine scheme practices on discrimination and equal opportunities before granting or renewing approval;
 - investigate training schemes where discrimination appears to have occurred or where there have been complaints;
 - forbid the use of placement providers which discriminate;
 - establish an Equal Opportunities Committee, and co-opt two AMB members to represent ethnic minorities and one to represent women;
 - examine statistics showing involvement of women black and disabled people;
 - prepare information on good practice;
 - recommend suitable training programmes for MSC and scheme staff and AMB members;
 - give responsibility for equal opportunities to senior MSC officers;
 - conduct a review of special provision regularly;
 - explain procedures for complaints by scheme participants and obtain feedback from them;
 - encourage scheme providers to use the ethnic minority press.
4. The Managing Agents, Sponsors and Scheme Providers are required to:
 - obtain and abide by the relevant Codes of Practice, Acts of Parliament and MSC guides (most notably the recently issued checklist YTS L71);
 - adopt their own policy whereby training of entire staff teams can occur to discuss implementation of the equal opportunity policy;
 - nominate a senior member of staff with responsibility for implementation of the equal opportunity policy;
 - keep a full record of alleged discrimination; notify the MSC and seek advice of the CRE and Equal Opportunities Commission; failure to do this could result in termination of contract with MSC;
 - examine content, character and approach of training provided;
 - inform trainees/workers of legal rights;
 - pay attention to marketing, recruitment and selection of candidates without discrimination on the grounds of race, sex or disability;
 - meet quota requirements under Disabled Persons Employment Acts 1944 and 1948;
 - include women, black and disabled people in Programme Review Teams.

The document notes that:

 - 'The recognition and elimination of discrimination is likely to be difficult, controversial and have resource implications. The recommendation of good practice is likely to challenge existing procedures. However, to fail to act would be to condone or collude with the denial of equality of opportunity'.

The Equal Opportunity Committee is drawing up a plan of action ... hopefully to put these good intentions into effect.

Appendix 2

The following description of schemes designed with equality of opportunity as an active concern is taken from Youth Training News September 1985.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE: EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY IN LAMBETH Councillor J V Sinclair: Chair, Economic Activity and Employment Committee, Lambeth Borough Council.

Lambeth

The London Borough of Lambeth typifies the problems faced by many inner city areas: high unemployment levels and a decline in manufacturing industry which began in the 1930s and is still continuing.

In 1978 Lambeth set up one of the first Local Authority Development sections in the country, which includes a Large Business Advisory Service and a Training and Employment section. From the beginning this has worked with the MSC and, despite criticisms of some aspects of the Commission's work, the Council sponsors three Youth Training Schemes and an Adult Training course. Through the Inner City Partnership the Council also gives the top-up funding to all the mode B1 and most Mode B2 schemes in the area. Overall, the Council directly supports half of the 1,000 YTS places in the Borough.

Action

The first action which the Council undertook was to introduce a system of detailed monitoring of staff and trainees. MSC figures compiled from start certificates provide some useful information. However, these figures do not necessarily include non-registered disabled and give no destination information. Statistics themselves do not achieve progress but they do help highlight awareness amongst scheme staff, and, most importantly, without them it would be difficult to know whether policies of promotion of equality were having an impact or not.

To promote work with black trainees the Council now insists that to receive its financial support schemes must adopt a series of positive measures. These includes adopting a formal equal opportunities policy, which includes discrimination becoming a disciplinary offence; allocating a specific worker to be responsible for implementing the policy; ensuring staff who recruit and place trainees receive race awareness/good practice training; the encouragement, to the extent that legislation allows, of under represented groups to apply for courses; and the establishment of a system for recording and reporting to the CRE all cases of pressure or instructions to discriminate by employers or providers of work experience. Recruitment policies are particularly important both for staff and trainees; ensuring advertisements go into the ethnic press, that any absolutely unnecessary pre-requisites such as qualification levels are removed, making a clear and open statement in advertisements of their commitment to provide equal opportunity. We also feel it is important that the Council's schemes have a significant proportion of black staff.

Through all these measures - and good informal, word of mouth publicity - the Council supported schemes are in a situation where up to 75 per cent of trainees are black. More importantly figures show that the rates of placement into employment are as high amongst black trainees as white.

Unfortunately local Mode A schemes have consistently had average levels of black trainees that are as low as 27 per cent and certain individual schemes have been much lower. It is our intention therefore to invite Mode A schemes to adopt our policies and practices and participate in the training which we will be organising.....

Equal Opportunities Policy

Finally, in overall terms we have begun to devise an Equality of Opportunity Policy specifically for YTS. We will expect all the Council supported schemes in the Borough to adopt this and would hope that other schemes operating locally will do the same, and actively put it into action.

Discrimination in YTS is a reflection of patterns of discrimination existing in the labour market and indeed society as a whole. The implications of this are that much wider involvement in positive strategies is required, by employers, government, education interests and the MSC itself. Lambeth Council has made a small start in doing what it can to put the theory of equality of opportunity into practice, provided we have the resources we will try and do more. However, it is to be hoped that others too, including all those reading this, will move from a passive acceptance of the principle of equality of opportunity to actively and positively promoting its development.

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Glossary

AMB	Area Manpower Board. There are 54 AMBs in England, Wales and Scotland. These are local bodies of the MSC responsible for approving and overseeing schemes; each AMB includes 3 trade union members.
ASTMS	Association of Scientific Technical and Managerial Staffs.
AUEW	Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.
CBI	Confederation of British Industry.
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality.
GMBATU	General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union.
ILO	International Labour Organisation.
LCU	Large Companies Unit, a national overseeing body of the MSC for national companies and some training bodies (eg the Construction Industry Training Board) which run YTS. It is independent of AMB control.
Mode 'A'	These are schemes where an employer, or local authority or other body (possibly a consortium of employers) agrees with the MSC to act as a managing agent and arrange a complete programme of work experience, training and education.
Mode 'B'	This is where the MSC acts as managing agent. There are two types of Mode B schemes: Mode B1 where the MSC arranges with one sponsor to provide a complete programme for the individual (eg through a training workshop or community project) and Mode B2, where the MSC contracts out all or some of the elements.
MSC	Manpower Services Commission. Set up on January 1, 1974 (under the Employment and Training Act 1973) to run the public employment and training services. The Commission is separate from the Government but accountable to the Secretary of State for Employment. Three of its ten members are nominated by the TUC General Council.
NALGO	National and Local Government Officers Association.
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.
NGA	National Graphical Association.
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees.
NUS	National Union of Students.
NUT	National Union of Teachers.
TUC	Trades Union Congress.

USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.
YTB	Youth Training Board. The MSC Youth Training Board is responsible to the MSC for the overall policy and management of the YTS. It includes three representatives from the TUC.
YTS	The Youth Training Scheme. Until April 1986 a year-long training programme open to all 16 year olds and 17 year olds who become unemployed within a year of leaving school. After April 1986 it becomes a two-year training period open to 16 year old minimum age school leavers, and one years training for those who spend another year in school.
YOP	The Youth Opportunities Programme. This was introduced in 1977 as a temporary measure, providing six months work experience and training opportunities for unemployed young people. Replaced by the Youth Training Scheme in 1983.