

DISCRIMINATION against black people was supposedly outlawed seven years ago by the Race Relations Act. But little has changed for black people in Liverpool, most of whom were born in the city. Now the Government are planning changes. But their proposed measures are weak and ineffective. And in some cases they will be positively harmful. Here we look at some of the failings...

Colour bar on ships to stay

1 THE FUTURE looks bleak for black people in Liverpool who want to find a job at sea. For years black people have been discriminated against by shipping companies and by members of the National Union of Seamen.

Many of the ships are deliberately kept all-white. And if black seamen do find jobs they are usually on the worst and lowest paid boats.

In 1968 the Government actually wrote into the Race Relations Act that ship owners could discriminate legally if an equal policy resulted in "persons of different colour, race or ethnic or national origins being compelled to share sleeping rooms, mess rooms or sanitary accommodation."

And now although the Race Relations Act is being changed, there is almost no chance of this disgraceful section being withdrawn.

South Liverpool Personnel, an in-

dependent employment agency catering for Liverpool's black community, have written to the Government, condemning the weakness of the proposals.

About the possible continuance of legalised discrimination against black seamen they say: "This has affected the employment expectations of young Liverpool black particularly severely."

"This agency has been forced to track down every available source of seagoing employment outside Liverpool in order to try to find work for young Liverpoolians."

"These jobs have often been with unfederated shipping lines and some of these, in their turn, have bowed to the prejudice of a captain at the expense of young black workers."

Among the companies operating from Liverpool who have been, and will probably still be able to discriminate are: J. Jacobs, McDonalds Lee and the Bennett Steamship Companies

Uncivil service

2 THE DEPARTMENT of Health and Social Security recently apologised for discriminating against a black Liverpool woman.

This is thought to be the first time the Race Relations Board have upheld a complaint against the DHSS.

Geraldine Ambrosius, a black Liverpool woman who works for South Liverpool Personnel, went to the Social Security offices to help a Somali woman obtain an insurance card.

But at the DHSS offices in Princes Road, Toxteth, they were both ignored then laughed at and shouted at by the staff.

One male official shouted: "I suppose you want the cheap card" (referring to the different rates of national insurance). And he added: "You all want the cheap card, you people who come in here."

And he spoke deliberately slowly to Geraldine as though she did not understand English, saying things like "Do you know what I mean?"

All claimants are likely to meet obstruction from Social Security offices. But the point South Liverpool Personnel make about this case of discrimination is the minute number of black people employed by the DHSS and other central and local government departments. Black people are normally on the other side of the counter.

There's nothing in the Government proposed legislation to force them to employ and train black people.

South Liverpool Personnel ask: "Where are all the black civil servants in Liverpool?"

"We had to nag, bully and finally involve a senior official in Manchester to even submit some applications for the last round of Department of Employment vacancies in Liverpool."

"Education, employment, training and careers work... these services are of central importance to black people yet in Liverpool at least have scarcely any black staff in any capacity at all. This will never change without special steps being taken."

Worse still to come

3 IN SOME cases the proposed legislation will make it easier and safer for employers to discriminate.

Something called 'unintentional discrimination' is being introduced. If proved, this will involve no compensation to the victims.

"This would be a godsend to employers in Liverpool," say South Liverpool Personnel in their report to the Government.

They add: "To our knowledge there is only one company in the city that has made any attempt to adjust its policies positively."

Nothing will change under the

new proposals, they say.

Also in future "complaints of racial discrimination in employment which are now investigated by the Race Relations Board... will be investigated by industrial tribunal."

Workers who have appeared before these tribunals know how biased they are. It will be even worse if the subject of discrimination is involved.

"Industrial Tribunals are still at the stage of cringing with distaste and embarrassment at anything connected with race, colour, black, white, discrimination or prejudice..." says the report.

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PICKETS warm themselves outside the factory.

WOMEN FIGHT FOR £6 RISE

EACH WEEK Toni Cartmel sews sleeves onto about 1,000 garments.

Another woman at the same factory puts the binding on 5,000 collars.

For this tedious work they receive £21.90 before deductions. These two are among nearly 1,100 women (and a small number of men) workers who have been doing something about their low wages.

They all work for a clothing firm called Northgate, which has four plants on Merseyside. 350 work at the Aintree plant, 600 at St Helens, 80 in Bootle and 60 in Clubmoor.

Ever since the management turned down their request for a £6 pay rise on November 5 the women have been on strike. They have brought production to a halt by keeping up a regular picket, whatever the weather.

Northgate say they can't afford more than £3.60 a week each.

In 1973 the company made £1,695,351 profit after tax, and last year they made £1,742,755.

What's more, Northgate is merely one of the subsidiaries of the multinational firm, Courtaulds. Last year they made £70 million after tax.

The women face a tough task. The textile industry has always been a labour intensive industry.

So Courtaulds have a definite policy of keeping wages down. (They were big employers of child labour in the Nineteenth Century.)

Today Courtaulds employ over

53,200 women in this country. Many of these, especially in Northgate factories, are girls aged 16-18. They earn only about £15 a week. Courtauld's other source of cheap labour is the black immigrant population who find it difficult to get other work.

Still, at least the strikers expected opposition from the firm. They didn't realise the obstruction they would meet from their own union rules.

Some of the women aren't in a union, but most are in the National Union of Tailors and Garmentworkers.

When the company refused the £6 rise, steward Jean Howard asked to be allowed to call a mass meeting. This was refused. The firm also refused to allow the works committee to meet.

Ignoring this, the women held a meeting in the canteen during their mid-morning break on November 6 and voted to walk out immediately.

But there was a catch. Union rules say any strike has to be approved by the executive of the union. And, however sympathetic the local official, the executive didn't approve.

Still, the unofficial strike spread. Workers at the three other Merseyside factories came out, and they were joined by six more Northgate factories in other parts of the country.

So ten out of 44 Northgate factories were on strike. But still this wasn't sufficient under union rules.

Before a strike can be made official, stewards from all the factories involved have to agree to recommend a ballot to their members.

Then everyone has to vote. And a two-thirds majority is needed.

This means the company have almost no worries. They can split the workers in different areas, and rely on the workers in the unorganised factories to vote against the strike.

The Northgate stewards met in Manchester and agreed to hold a ballot. This caused another problem, because again under union rules the workers have to return to work to hold a ballot.

This naturally breaks the unity and the enthusiasm for the strike.

The Merseyside strikers managed to avoid this problem by going in to work, voting, and then walking out again.

But they realise that, whatever the unity on Merseyside, the chances of achieving a two-thirds majority are slim, since 34 of the 44 factories are still working.

So the company will probably win and the union won't have to pay out any strike pay.

But what will happen at the Mersey side factories?

"We'll have to wait and see what the result of the ballot is," said Jean Howard. "But to go back now would mean we would have been defeated. And no-one here feels like giving in."

Test trial to begin soon

THE TRIAL of the George Davis supporters who were involved in the Headingly Test Match affair starts at Birkenhead Crown Court on January 6.

Supporters of the campaign to free Davis are desperate for accommodation near the courts.

Can anyone offer a house suitable for children for the three-week trial? Some rent could be paid.

(Offers or other help to: BWNIC, 48 Manchester Street, Liverpool 1.)

George Davis is serving a 20 year sentence for a crime he couldn't have committed.

The prosecution case rested on the identification evidence of 5 police out of a total of 42 possible witnesses in three separate parades. His four co-defendants were acquitted because of the lack of ANY identification evidence.

The court heard scientific evidence involving analyses of blood and saliva samples of four separate robbers. None fitted Davis or any of his four co-defendants.

Peter Chappell, who saw Davis when he was alleged to be holding up the London Electricity Board, and is

therefore certain of his innocence, has spear-headed the campaign to free him.

George's wife, Rose, and many of his friends have plastered East London with demands for George's release. A series of publicity stunts followed, including ramming Buckingham Palace gates and four newspaper offices in Fleet Street.

But not until Chappell and two others punched holes in the Test wicket at Headingly did the media react.



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