

November 18, 1964

Mr. Ben Segal
4349 Yuma Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C.

Dear Ben:

This will be, I hope, an objective and reasonably complete accounting of the problem I discussed with you recently by phone.

Until recently, Negroes in the Division of Sanitation, Department of Sanitary Engineering, had no opportunity to rise above the level of truck driver, and the only intermediate grade between truck driver (which rates Wage Board 6 or 8 depending on the weight of the truck) and laborer, Wage Board 3, was Leadman, WBR-3. (WB stands for Wage Board, R for "Regular Schedule," as distinguished from Food Service, Laundry, or Lithography Schedules).

Several years ago Negroes started moving into the supervisory ranks, a fact for which we claim credit. Outside the supervisory ranks, there were only a small number of skilled or semi-skilled positions and these, almost all of which were either in the Mechanical Branch (mechanics, sheet metal workers, etc.) or were "plant personnel." Most of these were Weighmasters, WBR-5, and Crane Operators — an apprentice grade of WBR-7 and the journeyman rate of WBR-10. The Weighmaster's primary duty was to sit at the scales and weigh trucks as they came in to the incinerator or the Garbage Transfer Station. Until this year, all Weighmasters were white. Until 1962 all Crane Operators were white. Thereby hangs our tale.

The Weighmasters job description specified operating a crane when needed. To qualify for the job it was necessary to be able to operate a crane. How did a WBR-3 laborer obtain the necessary ability? The answer was simple. When whites are hired as WBR-3s they are assigned to the plants, where they answer phones, fetch coffee, etc. Traditionally, those chosen for higher things were allowed to train on the cranes so that when they had been on the job long enough they were the only qualified applicants for Weighmaster jobs. (Until June of this year there was no promotion policy, no listing of vacancies, etc., but our negotiated policy is now in effect.)

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Anyway, the system was for years foolproof. Only whites were allowed to qualify for Weighmaster, and only Weighmasters could qualify for crane operator. We have changed the system now. It is no longer necessary for a weighmaster to be able to operate a crane, and to replace this grade as the needed step between WBR-3 and the apprentice level WBR-7 there has been created, at our insistence, a Crane Operator Trainee job, WBR-5.

Any WBR-3 with two years service is eligible for a WBR-5, and our negotiated promotion policy clearly states that, other things being equal, seniority is the determining factor. Therefore, by rights, the WBR-5 jobs should go to those applicants with the greatest seniority since no ability criterion can be applied for a trainee job. When we were arguing for the creation of these trainee jobs we were warned flatly that would do us no good, because the incumbent weighmasters, already WBR-5s, would be transferred into them as the most qualified applicants.

The jobs were posted; there were about 10 qualified applicants, and for the 3 vacancies 3 weighmasters were selected. We have filed an appeal via the route of anti-discrimination, that is, through Paul Rilling. Our case is based on the simple assertion that the weighmasters are in a better competitive position solely by virtue of being beneficiaries of discrimination. If it were not for a long standing practice of violating all kinds of specific District and Federal personnel policies by selecting whites, these particular individuals would not be in a position to qualify. It is not enough to cease discriminating -- we must also destroy the fruits of past practice.

We need help in this fight. In spite of a change in the leadership of the Division of Sanitation, discriminatory practices die slowly, and only as we expose them. There are still no whites throwing trash of collecting garbage, although there are white WBR-3 laborers; there are still Negroes doing specific semi-skilled jobs at the 3 grade, while whites who do not do the work carry the title and grade. And we know that they will fight desperately to make good on the implicit promise they made to their white weighmasters of preferential treatment all the way up the promotion ladder.

In official personnel terms, discrimination is not the issue here, being a thing of the past, and the weighmasters are willy-nilly, the "best qualified." We know that so far as the Division is concerned the case will not be settled on its merits, for if that were a criterion they would not have selected the weighmasters

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in the first place. It will be a political decision to make good on official anti-discrimination policies. Please let me know whether you think you can help us. I will, of course, be happy to furnish you with any other information you require.

Sincerely yours,

Warren W. Morse

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