

by Peter Harris

The South African system of 'job reservation', under which there is legal provision for members of specific race groups, has received considerable attention in the literature on South African labour problems.

Job reservation is important to those members of the group for whom the job is 'reserved' because it prevents competition from persons outside the group who may otherwise gain the necessary qualifications and challenge existing workers for places in the higher-paid job categories. Under a system of job reservation a dual system of payments (a high wage for those doing the reserved jobs, and a low one for those outside of them) can emerge. However, it can only be maintained if entry to the reserved jobs is prevented.

NO LEGAL BARRIER

In South Africa an unacceptable (for whites) rate of entry by blacks is prevented by the law, which enables a selected and controllable relaxation of any job barrier. In Rhodesia the situation is completely different. There is no legal job reservation along racial lines. No qualified person can be excluded from the relevant skilled trade union on the grounds of race; employers are able to select apprentices for the skilled trades from any race; persons doing the same job must be paid the same minimum rates of pay regardless of race; and the technical training colleges offer instruction to apprentices of all races in the same institution.

THE ACTUAL SIMILARITY

Under these conditions, commentators who see the legal job reservation system in South Africa as providing the most important barrier to the advance of black people in industry, would expect to find a fully integrated, non-racial, competitive employment structure in Rhodesia. In fact, the Rhodesian system appears very little different to that existing in South Africa. Most of the skilled job opportunities

are taken up by white immigrants. There are virtually no qualified black artisans in the printing, electrical, engineering and mechanical trades, and only in the building industry has there been significant advance by blacks into the skilled trades. Very few Africans are accepted into apprenticeships. From 1962 to 1967, an average of only 8 Africans were admitted to apprenticeships in each year. After 1967 the pattern changed somewhat, and in 1968 17 Africans started apprenticeships, this number rising to 49 in 1969 and to about 80 in 1970. (There are no exact official figures available from 1969 onwards). Even so, advance has been limited almost exclusively to the building trades. Alongside these black apprentices about 450 whites were admitted each year. The 'non racial' Rhodesian system has its negative side-effects as well. In 1961 a special trade school was opened for Africans, but it was closed in 1964. The government argued that since Africans could now enter the formally segregated technical colleges, there was no longer a need to offer separate facilities.

HOW THE RHODESIAN SYSTEM WORKS

How has a legally non-racial system produced a system that in effect is racially segregated? The answer is that 'job reservation, Rhodesian style' has been achieved by administrative methods, not by laws. (The Rhodesian example may have implications for South Africa as well: it is not enough to change the laws (ie. apartheid bye laws) because there are numerous ways that the same effects can be achieved without resorting to a rigid system of legal rules and regulations.)

Let us now consider how the Rhodesian system of job reservation actually works. Under the Industrial Conciliation Act, the trade unions can enter into legally enforceable agreements with employers that certain jobs in the industry can only be done by qualified and approved workers. The agreements carefully divide all aspects of a job up into those that can be done by skilled, by semi-skilled, and by unskilled workers. If a semi-skilled worker is found to be doing that part of the job which is reserved for the skilled worker, his employer is

fined and he has to be taken off the job. Inspectors from the Industrial Councils visit factories and other job sites to make sure that the agreements are being kept. There is therefore formal job reservation by *skill* groups, but not by *race* group. How then, do the skilled groups remain almost exclusively white? The answers lie in the way workers are recruited, and in the way they are admitted to the ranks of the qualified through the completion of an apprenticeship or by passing a trade test.

APPRENTICESHIP AND ASSISTED WHITE IMMIGRATION

The difficulty with apprenticeship, as a way of gaining a skill, is that employers have to indenture the apprentice, and supervise his on-the-job training. It is fairly expensive to train apprentices, particularly when employers are able to hire already qualified workers at no cost at all if the government brings them in under the assisted passage immigration scheme. The immigration scheme is aimed at recruiting white artisans, and hence as long as tradesmen arrive in Rhodesia in sufficient numbers, the employers see no need to train large numbers of apprentices. It is only the skilled worker needs of employers that cannot be satisfied by immigration that are satisfied through the training of apprentices.

EASIER ACCESS TO APPRENTICESHIP FOR WHITES

There are a limited number of apprenticeship vacancies each year, and white school leavers have easier access to these apprenticeships than black school leavers for a number of reasons. Firstly, the (white) employers have their own race prejudices and provided that sufficient whites apply for the vacancies, they will normally give them preference. Secondly, they fear that the existing white artisans may look for other jobs if they face the prospect of working alongside black apprentices. This fear is probably not justified, but it exists and is frequently used as an excuse. Thirdly, they fear that customers may object if the skilled work is done by blacks, and they prefer not to take any chances. The government and municipalities are

important in the field of training apprentices, and they probably fear that the white voters might object if they recruit blacks in preference to whites for the available vacancies. Finally, many established tradesmen may be able to speak directly to an employer about getting his son or the son of a friend an apprenticeship. Since these tradesmen are usually white, the people they apply on behalf of are also usually white.

HOW BLACKS ARE APPRENTICED

It is only in those trades where there are insufficient skilled white immigrants arriving to fill the expanding job vacancies, and where there are not enough whites applying for the apprenticeship vacancies, that blacks gain access to apprenticeship. The most notable example of such an industry is the building industry.

TRADE TESTING

Trade testing is a little more complicated. Where a worker has been doing a job that is very similar to one for which a certificate is required, he may apply to be tested. If his work is good enough, he will be issued with a certificate, without having to go through a full apprenticeship. It is claimed that it is very easy to apply different standards to the work of whites and blacks who sit the trade tests, because the test is so arbitrary, but this is not the main problem. In the electrical, printing and mechanical trades, blacks would usually not have had the opportunity to develop skills that would lead them on to a trade test. In building, on the other hand, mission schools sometimes run training programmes, and the pupils have the opportunity to improve their building skills in the reserves and on the mission stations. Once again, it is easy to understand why the advance of blacks into skilled trades has taken place largely in the building industry.

HOW THE SYSTEM IS MAINTAINED

The system thus keeps a form of racial job reservation without having to write it into the laws of the country. Employers prefer immigrant tradesmen because they do not have to spend money on training them. The government prefers immigrants for political reasons: the white immigrants have a high standard of living, and they have to support the government if they wish to maintain it. If enough immigrants came into the country, relatively few apprentices are trained. Provided that only a small number of apprenticeship vacancies have to be filled, it is probable that the very small white population will be able to supply applicants from amongst its members. There is no pressure on the government to build more technical training colleges because the existing ones are large enough to accommodate all of the apprentices in training. At the same time the system is very flexible: if there is a skill shortage in a *specific* trade, blacks can be trained without the government having to tear down its whole system of job reservation.

THE AFRICANISATION OF A TRADE

However, for those who wish to use the system to protect white living standards, there is a weakness. Once blacks gain access to a trade, it is difficult to prevent a more or less gradual but constant Africanisation of the trade. In a discriminatory society, black workers are not in as strong a bargaining position as white workers. Wages in the Africanised trade fall behind those in other trades where a white work force is able to use its political and economic power with greater effect. In 1964, average wages for skilled workers in the building trades were \$1.18 per hour, and only \$1.10 in engineering trades. By 1972, hourly wages in engineering had risen to \$1.72, but those in building had only risen to \$1.39. Under these conditions whites seeking apprenticeships have gone into the other trades when blacks have come into a trade. The available vacancies cannot be filled by whites, and more blacks are accepted for apprenticeships. Wages fall behind still further, and the

process of Africanisation continues.

KEY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

There are therefore three key factors which maintain the system of job reservation - Rhodesian style :

- * There is the actual reserving of the job for the members of a certain skill group. Job reservation can only work if there is some barrier. It does not *have* to be a race barrier (as it is in South Africa): once any sort of barrier is introduced, a racially segregated structure can be achieved by the administration of training and recruitment programmes.
- * There is the system of preference which is used to allow white workers to 'cross' the barrier and enter the higher-paid job groups.
- * There is the immigration programme which prevents shortages of skills emerging within the country, which could lead to a more rapid rate of Africanisation. The immigrants come in on assisted passages, and they receive other benefits. The government can therefore select and can try to recruit more artisans into those jobs in which a shortage seems likely to result in Africanisation.

CONCLUSION

If this analysis is correct, the immigration programme is the most important factor maintaining job reservation in Rhodesia. It is the immigration programme that prevents the 'trickle' which turns into the 'flood'. That is why the Rhodesian government put so much money into its 'Settlers '74' campaign when it seemed as if the immigration flow was slowing down at the end of 1973. That is why the immigration figures are seen as being so important in Rhodesia.

Immigration in Rhodesia is more important to white Rhodesians than it is in South Africa to white South Africans, because the white population in Rhodesia is so much smaller than it is in South Africa. It is a critical part of the elaborate

style of the country's system of job reservation:
a system that is in some ways more flexible than its
South African counterpart, but which is in every way
more vulnerable.

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