Hilda Ford: job baroness

She controls 23,000 urban jobs and loves every minute of it.

By Arthur W. Murphy

Hilda Ford controls the personnel practices and standards of well over 23,000 employees of the city of Baltimore and supervises a staff of over 100. She loves every minute of it.

Miss Ford, 53, is a native of Brooklyn, New York, and comes to Baltimore from Albany, New York.

A career public administrator, Miss Ford attended Brooklyn College and the College of St. Rose . Her career has provided her with extensive program experience which includes management of placement and counseling programs, training programs, and affirmative action.

During the sixties, she managed the largest Youth Opportunity Center in the country, established and coordinated community involvement in the programs of the New York State Employment Service, and served as assistant director of the Career Opportunities Division in the Civil Service Department.

She has spent close to 32 years in personnel work and is now the director of personnel for the seventh largest city in the country.

Hilda Ford is a black woman of tremendous strength and principles who above all else wants to be known as an effective administrator who has the compassion and sensitivity to handle the many human problems of the city's employees.

Miss Ford has very strong feelings about equal employment opportunities and the role city government plays in insuring equal access to jobs.

"Equal opportunity," she says, insures that any business can meet the needs of ths diverse society. Without representation from every part of society, a business can find itself behind the times and a step behind the way society is moving.

"Far more important is that every employer has to make a concerted and serious effort to recruit minorities and women It is no longer optional."

Miss Ford also believes that equal opportunity laws can be implemented with ease if the business and employment community contributes its top management to the effort.

"The reason why the objective of the equal

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opportunity law is being defeated in many businesses is due in large part to poor leadership and poorly written rules. People do not like to change and get wedded to systems that are traditional.

"When the system has failed to allow minorities to enter the system, things have to be changed. People have to be moved.

"In Baltimore, I have a lot of people angry but that is the way it has to be. Change does not occur easily. It occurs with conflict and discomfort.

"We live in a society dominated by white males and white male egos and images. There is a certain resistance to changing the habits and patterns which have perpetuated this domination. My being here must imply that there will be a different set of images, but more importantly sensitivities to the needs of people who are different from white males.

"This is not to say that people will be excluded, it simply means we will have a greater mix in the kinds of people who make decisions."

Power is the name of the game, relates Miss Ford. "We can have just about any kind of change we desire if the person who has the decision making responsibility wants it badly enough.

"I want the changed and I intend to be able to insure that we will have an equal and open employment system.

"Over the last couple of weeks I have had the opportunity to discuss the importance of getting different kinds of people in positions of authority. Someone related to me that the decisions made by white people are no different than those made by blacks.

"I know that that is not necessarily true. Decisions about employment or anything else are based on one's experiences. My judgements about women and black people have to be different because my experiences differ greatly from white males. I hope my judgements will reflect that difference."

Miss Ford's feelings about testing are very similar to those expressed by Eleanor H. Norton, chairperson of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (See cover story).

She also feels that testing does not always find the best employee. Quite often the best applicants are eliminated early in the game because of their inability to take a test.

"We have our own tests and do not use any of those standardized ones. To be frank most companies use these tests to reduce the number of 'finalists' for a particular job. Unfortunately I can not see any other way to avoid this.

"What we have done is eliminate what we feel to be extraneous material from these tests," Miss Ford states.

The job ahead for Miss Ford is very similar to that of EEO chairperson Eleanor Norton. Both have systems that have to be overhauled. Both suffer staff resistence to their strength and desire to change old patterns of defacto discrimination, and they both have plunged headon with strength and courage.

Hilda Ford does not offer any easy answers for the person seeking a job in this poor economic climate. She does however put the burden on you:

"Too many young people feel today that this country owes them something, that the country owes them a job, and that the country owes them a way to make a living. That is not the case in the United States."

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"On the otherhand, our system, our schools, our training institutes have very little relationship to the jobs needed in industry today. Quite often our young people are being trained to do jobs that have been replaced by a machine or a computer. The general state of our career guidance and counseling system is very poor."

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