

(continuation)

Class Handout NY-5 New York, Reading 14

The Aspirations of Norman Hill

Norman Hill was program director for CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) for 1963 and 1964. CORE has led much of the civil rights activity since 1960. Hill, however, left the organization to join the industrial union department of the AFL-CIO, where he continues to work for his people.

... When one takes the question of schools, whether it be in the North or South, to be really concerned about the kind of education that a minority child gets in our present system, it is not just merely the question of whether he is able to sit in the same classroom beside a white child, but what in fact happens to him during the school day. And if this is the real measure of the kind of education that a minority child gets, it is also an equal measure of the kind of education that all children in our society get. So in looking at this question we have become concerned then not just about the mere physical integration of the Negro minority child, but about what really happens inside our public school system. And the whole question of the equality of our school system is being raised as never before by the civil rights movement in its very attempt to foster and encourage integration. In so doing then we are making a political challenge because whether a board of education is appointed or elected the kinds of priorities that are placed upon the educational system and the kind of money that is set aside for it are in fact political decisions. The kinds of priorities that are raised, which will indicate whether or not we have a high quality educational system available for all children, is in fact dependent on the kind of political climate that you and I create in city after city throughout the country.

Secondly, when the civil rights movement, in addition to being concerned about whether or not we broke through in this or that lily-white area in housing, decided to move also to alleviate and change the basic housing conditions which great majorities of Negroes have to live in, in ghetto after ghetto throughout the North, we were again raising a basic decision in terms of the kinds of facilities, the kinds of priorities our society places on the social needs of the great majority of people. In so doing, we were saying that it was not enough just to provide decent housing for minority families, because we could only do that when there was enough housing, at rents all people are able to pay, for all people. And in so doing we were challenging the basic financial entrenched interests which had put a priority on the exploitation of minority peoples in order to maintain their own profits in the area of housing. So therefore we are mounting again a political challenge, because it depends on who really exercises power whether in fact we have enough decent quality housing for all people, black and white.

Norman Hill, Address at the St. Louis Area Conference of the Congress of Racial Equality, April 4, 1964. Printed with permission of Norman Hill.