

Decentralization Bill a Sham

J.R. Kennedy

Decentralization of the Detroit Public School System has emerged as a major issue confronting this city. Within this conflict there exists a strong potential for radical change. Recognizing this, many activist groups have joined in the struggle for effective decentralization.

This becomes a radical issue when the part that is played by education in the American system is considered.

The educational process is an important criteria to be used when evaluating the longevity of a culture and the overall value of a society. That educational process itself can be evaluated by means of an examination of the purpose, methods and conditions under which the institutions operate.

In a capitalist society that emphasizes production and consumption before personal expression, the purpose of education is not to encourage creative, self-reliant, free people, but rather it only emphasizes the individual's role as a producer and consumer.

The methods and procedure of education is also a direct function of the capitalist mentality. The "tracking system" is employed to insure that youth are expeditiously herded through the schools and channeled into specific tasks in the labor market. Quantity and quality are totally regulated by the needs of industry. Further the conditions of the facilities in a particular school vary according to the value placed upon that area by industrial labor market and needs.

The result of an educational process that is owned and controlled by industrial capital is-that it quickly becomes systematically racist. The black community, isolated, oppressed and victimized are condemned to economic poverty and the lowest level education.

To see these forces in action one need look no further than the Detroit Public School System. The Inner City schools are, despite a feeble construction program, over-crowded fire hazards crumbling with age. The teachers are unconcerned and incompetent. The recreational facilities, the lunch rooms and even the text books reflect the complete lack of individual consideration.

In response to these conditions leaders of the black community have called for decentralization of the school system.

Decentralization is necessary to bring closer to realization the concepts of self-determination and community control of the schools. Only through local control of schools can the black community, acting in their own interests, begin to implement real and permanent changes in the schools.

The West Central Organization (WCO), a consistent agitator for decentralization in Detroit, has called for a conference in December to discuss this concept. It was organized in response to the issues raised in a decentralization bill that was passed by the Michigan State Legislature.

To begin with, this decentralization bill is a total fraud. It is ambiguous, powerless and diluted. It gives no real authority to the local community, but instead reserves all meaningful and final authority to the central school board.

It divides Detroit into seven to eleven regions, each with a separate board but gives those regions no real controls over the schools. Every section of the bill ends by placing the area discussed subject to review by the central board. The regional boards would exist as little more than advisory bodies.

The State Legislature has, in its usual racist approach, merely instituted another level of bureaucracy that will serve to cloud the issue. Past history and present conditions of the inner city schools has proven that the present Board of Education is not only incapable, but deliberately negligent and racist, in the administration of their jobs.

In functional content this bill represents another attempt to fool the people and co-opt the issue. The bill is a shuck; it is a lie; and the people will not tolerate it.

As if passing this kind of bull-shit bill were not enough, the school board has further complicated the issue. They have invited the community to become involved in deciding the boundaries and number of the new regions, but they deliberately refused to release the kind of information that is needed to make the decision.

Then, in an act of pure bureaucratic racism, they claimed that, because the community had come up with no concrete plan, they themselves would draw the boundaries. This, of course, was their real intent from the outset and again the offer to allow community participation was no more than another bull-shit snow-job. The central board will now re-organize the regions to maintain their own power.

John Watson, director of WCO, charged that the "districts under the Board plan that leaked to the press last week, are gerrymandered to give whites control of black school districts. More than 112,000 black students will be placed under unsympathetic authority. The black community will be able to protect only 68,362 students from what amounts to white racist control."

Not only is this "decentralization" bill so weak that it is useless, but it also is intentionally constructed so poorly that it can be manipulated to further attack the black community.

There has been a great deal of discussion about this bill providing a stimulation for integration. This is not the issue. Quality education is the ultimate goal and this can only occur through community control and self-determination.

The decisions that define what is meant by "quality education" must be left to those in the local community that are most directly concerned. Neither integration nor separation are inherent evils. They become evils when they are used to disfranchise and manipulate the black community.

Artificial integration is a front that is being used to hide the racist motivations of the Detroit Board of Education. This situation would be completely contrived and would split the black community. This would undermined their power in the regions, violate self-determination and serve only to maintain white control of education in Detroit.

West Central Organization is calling for a city-wide conference on decentralization. It will be held at University of Detroit from December 27 through December 31. Those interested should contact: West Central Organization, 3354 Grand River, Detroit, Michigan 48208. Phone: 831-5252.

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