NEA'S HUMAN RELATIONS CENTER

• Educators are being called to leadership. Today's urgent problems resound with a rising cry for human rights, which must be answered if there is to be any hope for tomorrow. The teaching profession can and should become a vital, united force for human rights. We, who shape our nation's destiny through the teaching of its children, make up the largest professonal group in this country.

Recognizing the need to utilize the potential power of our profession, the 1967 Representative Assembly of the National Education Association created a special task force charged with recommending "a structure and program for the coordination and expansion of the human rights activities of the NEA and of the departments, divisions, commissions, and committees."

After months of study, the task force proposed the establishment of a new major unit, the Human Relations Center, and a broader, more intensive human rights effort throughout the Association.

In approving the **Report of the Task Force on Human Rights,*** this year's Representative Assembly committed NEA to its recommendations for action and endorsed its provocative study of the relationship of education to human rights. The introduction to the Report's analysis of American education states:

"The educational institution of the United States has helped to perpetuate the values, traditions, and way of life which have brought about, finally, the crises that confronts our nation today. The structure accomplishes this in two ways: by failing to provide the children of the middle class with a true perception of the position of the various cultures, including their own in relation to American civilization as a whole; and by failing to provide the children of the poor and the black not only with a true perception of the value of their cultures to the nation, but even with the mental skills and factual knowledge necessary to cope wth the technological civilization in which they are to spend their lives."

This statement does not mean that the majority of American educators have been advocates of bigotry and injustice. It does declare, however, that they have been part of a system whose traditions and structures have made it a perpetuator of discrimination. Let us acknowledge that our educational system has eroded the abilities of the children of the poor and minority groups and has nurtured misunderstanding and intellectual dishonesty in the minds of the children of prosperity. To overcome these failures, we must make the Human Relations Center an instrument of constructive change.

For example, the Human Relations Center will be conducting experimental programs and developing resource materals designed to help educators develop better relationships with students and with one another

The Center, however, has neither the resources nor the desire to be a national dispensary of policies, funds, personnel, and solutions for the problems of human rights. The Human Relations Center will have to rely on NEA members across the country to carry out its programs. The Center will act as a catalyst to help educators organize on state and local levels to resolve the problems of human relations in the ways most effective for the communities in which the problems exist.

One of the earliest tasks of the Center will be to develop in each state a cadre of teachers and administrators who are prepared to train other educators to conduct human relations workshops and programs in their schools and communities.

During our first year, much of our work will be devoted to the promotion and expansion of human rights organizations within state and local teachers' associations. We hope that by next fall our efforts will have helped increase from 3 to 50 the number of states with well-defined programs and adequately staffed human relations agencies.

Action at the state level is essential to the implementation of many task force recommendations. One of the most important of these is improvement in teacher education in order to give disadvantaged children the opportunity for meaningful instruction. The Task Force Report proposes that this be carried out by actively recruiting teachers from minority groups, by providing intensive postgraduate and in-service training for experienced teachers, and by giving future teachers effective preparation in human relations.

It s important to improve not only the content of what is taught, but also its manner of instruction, so that children will be motivated to learn and will have confidence in their ability to do so.

The Task Force Report recommends that educators work for open-housing laws and offers timely encouragement for proportional representation in the power structure of political parties. Another recommendation is the promotion of adequate funding legislation for better education and increased recognition of human rights in education.

Educators in each state should, of course, work out the programs most appropriate for the human rights problems in their regions. A number of states, for example, need to take steps to make the education of Indian children relevant to their culture. Human relations agencies in states with large urban populations might decide to concentrate on de facto segregation. States that have substantial non-English-speaking minorities need to develop bilingual educational programs.

In every state, a curriculum that is relevant to today and prepares children for a future of responsible citizenship is crucial. Most educators probably accept the recommendation of the Task Force Report that the economically and socially disadvantaged be given the education necessary to help them overcome their handicaps. But more educators must become convinced of the validity of the Report's statement that affluent white children need education in minority-group history and human rights if they are to make their maximum contribution in a multicultural society.

It is encouraging that conferences on the treatment of minorities in textbooks have been held in several states, that minority groups are beginning to be represented on state textbook selection committees, that some state boards of education are distributing multiethnic bibliographies, and that state legislatures are beginning to pass laws requiring the adoption of textbooks which adequately treat minority groups. There remains, however, a great deal yet to be done in the development of curriculums to strengthen the teaching of human rights.

Much of the impetus for state action on bilingualism and multiethnic curriculums came from national conferences sponsored by the former NEA-PR&R Committee on Civil and Human Rights of Educators. The Center will follow the task force's recommendations to carry on the efforts formerly conducted by the Committee, particularly the holding of broadly representative national conferences on civil and human rights in education.

Resolving the complex problems of human rights requires the co-operation of all segments of the community. To deal with a variety of issues, ranging from faculty desegregation to the problems of Appalachia, we will continue the Committee's practice of bringing together teachers, students, parents, government officials, scholars, religious leaders, and civil rights workers. During the sixth and seventh national conferences (which will be held this year) and in those of the years to follow, we will provide the opportunity to cut across racial, economic, occupational, and organizational lines while exploring the questions of human rights.

State action is crucial to carry on the Committee's efforts to combat discrimination in hiring and dis-

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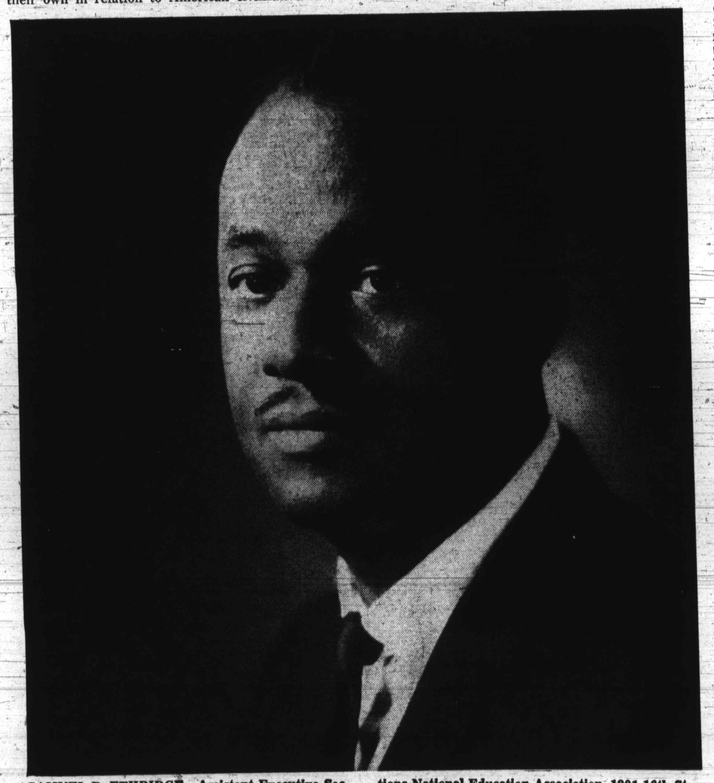

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Advertisement

Teachers in New York City using latest methods to aid inner city pupils

By DAISY HICKS

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* * *

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