

A REPORT ON PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA  
January 9, 1962

The future of public schools in Prince Edward County seems to rest at the moment upon the Virginia State Supreme Court. Although Judge Orin Lewis ruled against tuition grants from State funds for students in Prince Edward, he refused to rule on whether or not Virginia officials were responsible for operating, and keeping open a public school system. He said such a ruling must be passed upon first by the State Supreme Court.

Rev. L. F. Griffin of Prince Edward County has petitioned the Court on behalf of his son for a writ of mandamus to compel the Prince Edward County Board to appropriate funds for public schools. Briefs have been filed with the Court, by both the state and Prince Edward County, contending that the county is not required by the state Constitution to appropriate funds for public schools. The Virginia State Supreme Court heard oral arguments on the issue on January 8.

Lawyers for Rev. Griffin contend that the state Constitution requires boards of supervisors to levy and collect school taxes for free public schools. They insist that the fundamental law of Virginia clearly expresses the purpose and mandate of its citizens, that the system of public schools operate in every city and county in Virginia. They further contend that boards of supervisors in any locality are recognized by the state Constitution as mere administrative agencies of the state, created for the execution of essential state functions, including public education.

State Attorney General Gray and counsel for Prince Edward County argue that the Constitution simply "authorizes" boards of supervisors to make such appropriations and that it is not mandatory. They further argue that whatever ruling is handed down, imposing demands upon the General Assembly of the state, will have nothing to do with Prince Edward County officials. To this the counsel for Griffin replies that the Constitution does not permit the General Assembly to grant the county board the power to strip the school board of funds with which to operate public schools.

So the battle continues. Reliable sources from within Prince Edward say that counsel for the county feels certain that technicalities can be found to hold off integrated schools through 1962-63 school year, and that this word is being circulated among the "resisters".

In the meantime, what is the actual school situation within Prince Edward? Around five hundred White children are attending the \$400,000 campus-type school plant known as Prince Edward Academy. Around nine hundred other White children attend private

schools within the county. Seventeen hundred Negro children are without public education for the third straight year. Where are these children, and what is happening to them? Some two hundred Negro children attended schools outside the county in 1960-61, and the exodus of Negro school-age children took a jump this year. Twenty-nine are attending schools in Washington, D. C., sponsored by a group known as the Prince Edward Educational Committee. This committee was formed in August, 1961, by Dr. Hans G. Furth, a Catholic University Psychologist, and Mrs. Burma A. Whitted, who helped send Front Royal, Virginia children to school in D. C, during 1958. The Virginia Council on Human Relations has contributed \$100.00 toward this project.

The American Friends Service Committee has placed some Negro children in schools in other states. But most arrangements for Negro children to attend public schools have been handled by the parents themselves. In most cases the children simply go to live with relatives in other counties of Virginia, or in other states. But the majority of the seventeen hundred Negro children in Prince Edward County, Virginia do not go to school at all. With no public schools for three years, this means that children between ages 6 and 9 are suffering most. Some make-shift institutes have been operated by Negroes within the county, and interested Whites from without, for the past two years, but this year these are no longer functioning.

At the present, several members of the Richmond-Petersburg Area Council on Human Relations are spending from one to two days per week in Prince Edward doing such things as showing movies, and seeking to recruit help and materials just to be able to teach school-agers to read and write. These people are doing this out of their concern for those nine year olds who cannot write their names. This indicates that there are concerned people. One of those working two days per week in Prince Edward, is a correspondent with Associated Press. Another is a Social Worker. Most every week someone comes by our office, either on their own, or as a representative from some National group, on their way to Prince Edward to see what can be done. The American Friends Service Committee, over the Christmas Holidays, sent two of their representatives to Prince Edward to consider the feasibility of employing someone to remain there until at least September of 1962. This would be done with the hope that public schools could be re-opened by that time, and the representative would seek to establish some rapport and communication between White and Negro Leadership before that time.

Within the county there is a small core of concerned White persons with whom any stranger can talk. These persons have sought to do something from within the local community, but always the resistance was too great and the intimidations too strong. Attached is a copy of such an effort made by these local White leaders as far back as September 1959. Needless to say, it failed. (See Attached copy entitled "Purpose of our Discussion").

What is the future for Prince Edward? No one seems able to predict the when, or exactly the how, public education will be restored in Prince Edward, nevertheless, most everyone knows that it will come. The opponents say they can hold it off another school year, and this is admitting that they cannot hold it off forever. Encouraging signs are found in the fact that local people seem confused and statewide campaigns seeking to raise \$200,000 to support the private White schools this year have failed to bring forth any report of success - while being led by state leaders which include six state Senators and eleven Congressmen, as well as some Judges and Mayors over the state.

People the world over know about the only jurisdiction in the United States where there are no public schools and people the world over are concerned. But for the present, the future of Prince Edward's plight seems to rest in the hands of the Supreme Court of the State of Virginia.

## PURPOSE OF OUR DISCUSSION

In order to restore and maintain lines of communication between the White and Colored citizens of Prince Edward County we suggest that an approximately equal number of representatives of both races meet together and explore the following question in reference to the situation in which we find ourselves:

1. How close the White and Colored leaders are in their attitude and desire to work out a practical solution looking forward to the opening of all public schools in Prince Edward County in the fall of 1960.

a. As a basis for the discussion and action, we believe the 1954 Court decision should be recognized as law, whether constitutional or not. However, we agree that the citizens of Prince Edward County should use every influence and means of persuasion - short of force - toward postponing its operation for a period of three years. At the close of this period this agreement may be renewed or another agreement proposed for consideration and acceptance.

b. During the three year period we recommend that bi-racial committees, composed of three representatives of each race, be established in each magisterial district for the purpose of holding quarterly meetings to discuss any problems that may develop.

The magisterial committee shall compose a county bi-racial Assembly which shall concern itself with specific problems brought before its attention and shall in general act as a policy-making body.

c. That during the three year period the leaders of both races will make an honest attempt to act independently of all outside organized or unorganized influence, and in so doing sincerely seek to work out our common problems among ourselves. In keeping with our determination, the bi-racial groups organized in Prince Edward County shall inform any interested organizations outside, of our desire to solve our own problems, and request co-operation.