

**Harvey:** Not only did they cut the Board's salary in half, but they took away all office staff for ward and at-large board members. I am the Ward 1 Board of Education office. I have no staff to help me with constituency concerns. People can't communicate with me through my office, as was done in the past. The only thing that is remaining at the *elected* Board, is an acting executive secretary, with two assistants. These people take care of all the responsibilities we have at the Board. Just recently, the Board of Trustees allocated some monies to the Board of Education to bring staff people to deal with the only remaining function we have, and that is the chartering of schools.

**EIR:** Exactly what did the Board do before?

**Harvey:** We made policy, we did oversight, we did budgeting, we did everything that the Board of Trustees now does. We had full responsibility as policymakers, and we also had full responsibility for submitting our budget to the City Council. We had the authority to hire the superintendent, to fire him, also. All of that has been taken away. . . . So we are really just an advisory group of people, and you cannot advise people on what impact their policies and their decisions are having, if you are not included in the process of developing the policies as well.

**EIR:** You don't regularly meet with the Board of Trustees?

**Harvey:** We have had some meetings, but they are not substantive. For example, suppose there is to be a change in the policy; we don't have that kind of dialogue.

**EIR:** So, if they want to change the policy, they'll change it, and if you know about it, you know, and if you don't, you don't.

**Harvey:** That's right.

**EIR:** Did you also decide curriculum?

**Harvey:** Yes, we did. We no longer have that authority. We decided curriculum, we decided the evaluation of teachers, principals, we set policy that had an impact on the entire educational process. All that has now been turned over to the Board of Trustees. The only thing we have power over right now is issuing charters to schools.

We have approved charters for six schools, but right now, there are two operating. One is called the Options School, and the other is called the Marcus Garvey School.

**EIR:** If I am approved to operate a charter school in the District, once I get that charter, am I accountable, other than some reporting to you, to the Board of Trustees?

**Harvey:** No, you are not.

**EIR:** So, what's the effective difference between that, and privatization?

**Harvey:** Basically, it's a form of privatization.

**EIR:** And that's what you, who used to make policy for 100,000 children in the public schools, now have power over.

**Harvey:** We have a tremendous problem with our capital budget. Our buildings are an average of 50 years old. As a result of that, the school system has gone through the last four years of court mandates, in which the city has been sued for fire code violations. The system has been in a state of serious chaos over the last ten years, and there's been a continual deterioration of that process, based on the infrastructure. I can only see the return of public education when we can repair some of the infrastructure which is dilapidated, if not completely broken. . . .

We're going to have to give parents *true* parental choice, across the board. There is always the question of equity, and that is very clear in the District of Columbia.

If you go into areas west of the park, you see a different school system than what you see in parts of Washington east of the river. Socio-economic background is a factor. The ward I represent has a very diverse population—African-American, Vietnamese, African, Spanish—you name it. As a result, we have a very complex system. And there are a lot of things that must be done in order to attract, back to public education, the parents that we have lost. And many of the Congressional overseers, for lack of a better phrase, tend to want to push vouchers down the throats of the District of Columbia, and we do see an ever-growing increase in the number of charter schools.

Then there's the voucher system. In 1989, the voters rejected vouchers in a referendum. What the voucher system does, is it gives you about \$3,200 per year per child. If you look at the average private school, it costs \$4,000-4,500 to get into these schools. Parents are expected to pay the difference. If they can't pay the difference, or if children misbehave, then, they are "referred back" to the public school system. I think vouchers are a way for a lot of individuals to get around public education, by participating in private education with public funds.

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## Interview: Ron Hampton

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### D.C. police department no longer serves the citizens

*Mr. Hampton, who is now retired, was formerly the head of the National Black Policemen's Association. He was interviewed by Dennis Speed.*

**EIR:** How would you characterize the present situation in D.C. for law enforcement?

**Hampton:** My sense is that, as a result of the Financial Authority, and of the fact that the mayor's power was stripped

from him, in relation to his having input into the selection of people to serve in selected positions in the police department, and those people who serve right under the chief, and those that serve as district commanders around the city — when that took place, and the mayor was relieved of that part of his job, that removed the process by which citizens, like myself, could influence the selection process in the police department. Because, the chief of police doesn't have to pay any attention to us. They don't believe that they work for us. They don't believe that we pay for them.

I think a lot of the things [the Financial Control Board has] done . . . have flown in the face of the citizens of this city. If we find out anything, it's after the fact. They haven't talked to us about *our* police department, and how *our* police department is going to change. We think we should have had some sort of participatory role in the decisions.

I was a police officer myself. I haven't been retired for that long. And there's nothing going on there that I think citizens should be totally locked out of. But that's what has happened.

**EIR:** How long were you a police officer?

**Hampton:** I worked in that institution for over 23 years. And I would be one of the first to stand up and say that there are some changes that need to take place; that there are some things that are broken, that need to be fixed. But the whole notion that *citizens*, the people who live here, the people that the police work for, the people who come from these very communities that the police don't live in, and even when they are working, they don't get out of the cars, and interact, and communicate with the citizens — for them to go ahead, and to do what they did, in the way that they did it, was in total disregard of the citizens.

**EIR:** Do you know what they are contemplating as changes?

**Hampton:** The newest proposal on the table, presented to the City Council by the police chief, and Booz-Allen and Hamilton [management consultants], is to establish their version of a "citizen's complaint review board." A couple of months ago, they decided among themselves that they were going to set up new police district boundaries in the city, and also to revamp what the police department, as we have known it for a long time, is.

We're not unsophisticated. We're not ignorant. And, in any case, the processes that go on in the police department, aren't sophisticated. People who are police officers now, weren't born police officers. You have to learn that on the job. There's nothing that prepares you for that, before you get there.

**EIR:** Did you start as a policeman on the D.C. force?

**Hampton:** Yes. I started here. I had been in the service, got out, worked for a short moment on Capitol Hill, and then I decided to be a police officer. I really wanted to help people.

This is my home. I was born and raised in Washington, and I wanted to do something about some of the problems I saw. I wanted to be able to help young people. And believe me, I'm not a romanticist. At the time I joined, I didn't think about what it would be like. But basically, I wanted to be an officer, because that was a place in which you could help. But I also have to say, that from the very moment that I joined the police academy, and started my training and other things, I began to see a different twist on that notion of wanting to help people.

**EIR:** Washington D.C. was one of the last cities to be integrated. The Washington Redskins, for example, were one of the last teams to hire African-American players, and the Klan rallied outside of what is now RFK Stadium, I believe, in protest. There was a lot of tension, back when you started, between people in the city and the police, wasn't there?

**Hampton:** Yes. I remember when black police officers couldn't arrest white people. And this was 30 years ago, so we're not talking about 50, 75, 100 years ago. Just 30 years ago. Just 30 years ago, black police officers couldn't ride in the same car with white police officers. The cars were not integrated. Thirty years ago, they would park the cars, and black police officers could not use them. They "didn't deserve" to ride. And yet, they sat side by side, in the precinct.

The police department was full of racism. In my opinion, that racism is still there today, and very much part of the institution of policing in the District. The Metropolitan Police Department is one police department, but there's a different "policing strategy" in Georgetown, than there is in Anacostia. There's a different policing strategy in Northwest Washington, than there is in Southeast Washington. And I saw it before I was a police officer; I saw it while I was a police officer; and I've seen it since I've been retired.

**EIR:** With the emergence of the Financial Control Board, are we seeing a resurgence of the old segregationist attitudes?

**Hampton:** I think so. There are a lot of things that are beginning to revert. The number of African-Americans in the police department is steadily decreasing, over a five-year period. Where the African-American percentage of the department was 65%, I talked with some guys now, and they say that a couple of the last classes that have gone through the academy have been all white — no black men or women in those classes. As a result, African-Americans in the police force are down to 53-54%.

Also, there is a resurgence of mean-spiritedness. This is not just among white police officers, but black and brown police officers, too. They exhibit a mean-spiritedness, which I think is a result of this power that has been given to the department through the recent changes. It permeates their mentality, the way they go about doing their job. They don't seem to care about the citizens of the city. And when you have that condition, combined with the financial cuts, that is an explosive recipe.