RACISM AND BUSING IN BOSTON

by RADICAL AMERICA

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An Editorial Statement

"Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts" was a bumper sticker that appeared in the only state that voted for McGovern in 1972. That slogan has an ironic ring now, because some of the people who voted against Nixon are engaging in organized and sustained racist attacks on Boston's black people. Since the opening day of school on September 12, racist attacks have come in several forms, including the stoning of buses carrying black students and the beating of two blacks by mobs in South Boston. In the large black housing project at Columbia Point, tenants responded to violent white attacks by arming and organizing for self-defense. To counter this, the police occupied Columbia Point.

The busing of black and white children to relieve racial imbalance in the Boston schools has finally been won after

a decade of concerted School Committee opposition to improvements in the education of black children. Now, in addition to continued obstruction by the School Committee, a serious problem is developing in the form of organized opposition to busing in many of Boston's predominantly white working-class neighborhoods.

Although Democratic Party demagogues like City Councillor Louise Day Hicks and School Committee Chairman John Kerrigan have promoted racist politics, we cannot underestimate the deep-seated, well-organized quality of racism among large numbers of white working-class people in Boston. Unlike other cities where whites launched violent but rather short-lived demonstrations against busing, the opposition to desegregation in Boston has been mobilized for several years on a block-by-block basis in predominantly Irish South Boston and other sections. It will be a dangerous force to contend with for some time to come. The racist scum of the earth, Ku Klux Klan and Nazi Party organizers, have come to South Boston, sensing the potential for a turn towards fascism.

Because white working-class people have been prominent in the racist attacks, it has been difficult for some socialists to explain racism without reducing the problem to one in which either the corporate elite is manipulating working-class people by provoking racism, or to one in which the race-baiting politicians of the old Democratic machine are whipping up racism to advance their own political fortunes. While both of these are partial explanations, they miss the real point. White working-class racism is not simply a question of bad ideas being put into people's heads by racist demagogues, nor is it simply a question of the ruling class manipulating workers into racist positions. There is a material basis to white working-class racism in Boston and elsewhere.

White working-class people oppose integrated education as a way of defending their material advantage over blacks. Most white working-class people are against busing white children to black schools because in a racist society black schools are poorer schools. Many white working-class people are against even voluntary busing of black children to white schools because they fear that if black students come

in, their "neighborhood" schools will be allowed to deteriorate in various ways. Some people in Boston's white working class have chosen to help blacks fight discrimination by joining the struggle of blacks for equality. Many others have chosen to defend segregation by attacking the black struggle for equality in education. The thrust of the racist movement that has crystallized this fall is to keep black people in their place — in segregated schools, in ghetto housing, and in the lowest-paying jobs.

The question of neighborhood schools is not the issue in Boston. White working-class parents have in some cases chosen to send their children some distance to attend predominantly white parochial schools, or even to special Boston-wide public high schools. Busing is not really the issue, because schoolchildren have been bused back and forth across the city for some time. Nor is the issue one of compulsion. School itself is compulsory, regular attendance is compulsory, a certain curriculum is compulsory. Busing is no more forced than any of these other aspects of schooling.

The issue is racism, and it is wrong to shift the debate away from it at this time. To argue now about the educational value of busing or of community-controlled schools versus integrated schools would be to equivocate. It is wrong to avoid the issue by arguing about the merits of various hypothetical alternatives; options to the current busing plans do not now exist for most black parents in Boston. While we do not call for integration, we do oppose forced exclusion and segregation of blacks and other minorities; we support their right to integration either as a goal or as a tactic to secure equality. It is also wrong to avoid the issue by emphasizing the poor quality of white schools in Boston. However poor their quality, there has been an organized racist attempt to attack black children attending these schools.

While the serious problems with this particular busing plan are the fault of the court and the obstructionist School Committee, we think it is wrong to see busing as a ruling-class plot. The achievement of busing is, in fact, the result of a long struggle Boston blacks have waged against segre-

gation. We oppose those left groups who attack the plan because it seems to be dividing workers at the present time. Most black people in Boston, whatever their initial assessments of the busing plan, now support busing as one way of achieving better education for their children. In this case, we support the right of black students to be bused in safety. We also believe white children need to be bused because, unless there is a two-way busing, the black schools will be allowed to deteriorate further. In fact, some black schools have already been repaired in anticipation of the arrival of white students.

To waver on the issue of busing is to play into the hands of those racists who know that the defeat of busing (which is possible) would greatly strengthen the racist status quo. If the racists succeed in stopping busing, they will have gained a victory and set a dangerous precedent; they will also have inflicted a real defeat on black people and the movement for working-class unity. Conversely, a black victory will be a working-class victory. As black people demand and achieve democratic rights and equality, they are transforming the structure of the working class. In doing so, they narrow the differences between blacks and whites, erode the material base of racism, and create greater opportunity for class unity. In this sense, we see this black demand for equality as a class demand.

In short, we are arguing that racism is at the center of the conflict in Boston this fall. We see racist divisions within the working class as one of the mainstays of capitalist domination. Since our political focus is on racism, its origins and development, we are less concerned here with important questions about quality education or the history of the Garrity busing decision.

Given this emphasis on the problem of racism, our argument proceeds as follows: 1) we look at how the political economy of metropolitan Boston structures the situation within which the black struggle and the white reaction have developed; 2) we present the recent history of attempts by Boston black people to improve educational opportunities as one way of decreasing the material differences between blacks and whites; and 3) we then show how white racist

organizations — led by the School Committee — have fought to retain their material privileges.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RACISM IN BOSTON

The development of black support for busing and the strength of the opposition to busing in white working-class areas must be seen in the context of an evolving struggle over scarce resources not only in education, but in the job and housing markets as well. The bigger struggle being waged over desegregation is clearly part of a larger and longer struggle that has taken place within Boston's troubled political economy.

Although New England led the nation in industrialization during the early 19th century, Boston remained largely a commercial and financial center. Since it was not primarily an industrial city, the first immigrants sought jobs in the public sector through the Democratic patronage machine that developed in the early 20th century, and clung tenaciously to craft jobs in the building trades and light industries through exclusionary AFL unions.

Because Boston did not become a major industrial center, the black migration to the North during World War I was much smaller than it was in other cities. Although the rate of post-World War II black migration to Boston has been comparable to that of other Northern cities, blacks still constitute a relatively small proportion of the population (18%). And of course blacks have suffered in Boston's severely limited job market. Lacking industrial jobs and lacking access to jobs in unionized sectors, black migrants were stuck for years in service occupations and other menial jobs. Unlike earlier immigrants, notably the Irish, they were not able to secure government jobs, which still occupy a large percentage of the city's work force. However in the post-World War II era, Boston blacks have slowly improved their occupational position by gaining federal and state jobs, by commuting to the new suburban jobs in light industry, and by gaining a foothold in Boston's enormous private institutional sector. Black women are increasingly important in the city's hospitals and, to a lesser extent, in its large secretarial labor force.

Blacks have even worked their way into some of the better paying industrial jobs traditionally dominated by whites, notably in meatpacking, where one of the city's few CIO unions developed in the 1930's. Although building trade unions were still officially segregated through the 1960's, a few blacks worked their way into some crafts.

This black progress, though rather limited, has nevertheless frightened many white workers who maintain their jobs through the old patronage machine (city workers, white collar and blue collar) or the old exclusionary AFL unions, especially in the building trades. White workers still enjoy important advantages over black workers. Although the proportion of blacks increased in many occupations between 1950 and 1970, the black-white wage differential did not change over these years. In 1970, as in 1950, black workers earned only about two-thirds what their white counterparts earned. Furthermore, many jobs remained closed to blacks, including most of the best-paid construction jobs, jobs as policemen and firemen, and upper-level white collar positions.

White working-class people in Boston's most segregated areas have also maintained a relative advantage over blacks in the housing market. Racist real estate agents and discriminatory bankers that "red-line" ghetto districts have prevented blacks from moving into areas like South Boston, Hyde Park and West Roxbury where many working-class people own their own homes. Blacks have also been kept out of the poorer white working-class sections where most people rent rooms in three-decker apartment buildings or projects. Although the white tenants in these poorer sections suffer from rent-gouging landlords and poor city services, they have not suffered nearly as much as blacks.

Tenants in the worst white housing projects have used violence to keep blacks out, because they believe that the presence of blacks or Puerto Ricans will cause housing to be neglected even further. For example, last year white youths in South Boston's D Street Project shot and killed a black teenager who lived with the only black family in the project. Subsequently, the several Puerto Rican families in the project were literally driven out. As bad as the D Street project is, its white residents believe that it could get worse

if black or Spanish-speaking tenants move in.

The racism of these white tenants does not result simply from a hatred of non-whites; there is also a material basis to this racism. These poor whites are making last-ditch efforts to defend their relative advantages over blacks and to prevent the spread of ghetto-like housing conditions in their neighborhoods. This directly parallels their defense of white "neighborhood schools" and their opposition to busing white students to black ghetto schools which have been deliberately neglected over the years.

The bad housing situation in Boston has been worsened by the urban renewal demolition which began in the 1950's. It destroyed all of the multi-ethnic West End and most of the racially-mixed South End, both low-rent districts, and it wiped out nearly all of Lower Roxbury, which used to be the center of the black community. Urban renewal occurred when the old patronage machine was deposed and new "good government" politicians appeared who would assist big capital instead of trying to bleed it for taxes as James Michael Curley did during his mayoralty. The old machine lost out to the new politicians who today are represented by Mayor White on the city level, but the machine saved its Irish and Italian neighborhood strongholds from urban renewal. It also preserved some relatively low-rent housing in these neighborhoods while similar housing was being destroyed in more mixed sections of the city where the machine no longer had political power.

The post-World War II suburbanization intensified the segregation of the housing market in the area. The GI Bill opened the suburbs to many white workers, but racist real estate companies and banks helped these working-class suburbs remain as lily white as the wealthy suburbs. Over 90% of the black population in the metropolitan region lives in Boston and Cambridge.

Working-class movement to the suburbs accelerated in the 1940's and then again in the 1960's with the development of light industries and research outfits along Route 128. But a large number of white working-class people have remained within the city limits of Boston to compete with growing numbers of blacks and Spanish-speaking people for scarce jobs, poor housing, and limited school facilities.

In early October, Massachusetts Governor Sargent called in 350 state troopers. Here a contingent marches from South Boston High School to Gavin Junior High School. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX

Boston has never had a significant tax base. Old industries, textiles and shoes, developed outside Boston while private, tax-free institutions multiplied within the city. When the Irish political machine took over the city during World War I, Yankee finance capitalists responded with a freeze on large-scale building which lasted until urban renewal began in the 1960's. However, urban renewal failed to increase the city's tax base to the extent that city services improved substantially. Meanwhile, suburbanization drew more taxpayers out of the city. Today, Boston's metropolitan area has a much larger percentage of suburban dwellers than any other city in the country. So Boston's hard-pressed taxpayers, including many working-class home-owners who have remained in sections like Hyde Park and West Roxbury, support city services that are exploited by an increasing number of suburban commuters.

Inner-city whites have a good deal of resentment against middle-class suburbanites who use the city's services but escape its frustrations, notably busing. However, this resentment of the suburbanites' class privileges has not diminished their hostility toward the city's black people. Instead of really attacking the many obvious privileges suburbanites enjoy, many white working-class people insist on attacking the favors blacks have allegedly received from the government and private institutions of various kinds.

While it is true that blacks have fought for federal and state jobs with increasing success and that some blacks were able to set up their own forms of patronage through a few of the federal poverty programs in the sixties, these developments failed to compensate for the exclusion of blacks from the best paying blue collar and white collar jobs in the city. Furthermore, blacks have certainly not displaced any white workers on the federal or state level, let alone on the city level, where black people are all but excluded from the thousands of jobs still dispensed by the patronage machine. As a result, blacks get much worse treatment than whites when it comes to city services, partly as a result of the fact that the police, fire, sanitation, and street repair departments, as well as other agencies, are still staffed almost exclusively by whites.

But it is no easier to convince white working-class people that blacks get poorer city services than it is to convince them that blacks are not taking any more advantage of welfare than poor whites. In an economy of scarce jobs; rising taxes, rents, and food prices; declining city services; and deteriorating schools, any gains made by black people, no matter how limited, are viewed as a threat by most white working-class people. And when the only organizations that represent these whites are exclusionary craft unions and the demagogic remnants of an old patronage machine, the result is that the fears and frustrations of many white working-class people are turned into organized racism. While the racist mobilization led by machine politicians uses codewords like "forced busing" and "neighborhood schools", it is clear that more is involved than school desegregation. The racist mobilization developing in Boston is also a defense of important material advantages white workers still enjoy over black workers in the crippled political economy of Boston.

THE BLACK STRUGGLE AGAINST SEGREGATION

Racism emerged as a major force in the politics of education in Boston in the early 1960's. In 1960 a number of people upset with the worsening conditions of the Boston schools formed "Citizens for Boston Schools". Primarily a white group with an elite professional membership, the group did involve some younger leaders of the black community. The Citizens group ran four candidates for the School Committee in the fall of 1961. Its two white candidates won, and its two black candidates lost. Neither before nor since has there been a black member of the School Committee. Also in the early 1960's the Education Committee of the NAACP tried to get the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) to both recognize and criticize the existence of de facto segregation in the Boston schools. But the MCAD refused to do so; in fact, it said that racial segregation was not a problem in the schools. The NAACP continued to push for the recognition of de facto segregation. In the fall of 1962 it tried unsuc-

cessfully to discuss the problem with the Superintendent of Schools.

In the spring of 1963 the Citizens group, the NAACP, and CORE all completed studies of the Boston schools that were critical of the de facto segregation in the city. The three groups began to support each other's work. Then, in May, the NAACP came out with a more detailed report which requested a public hearing before the School Committee. The Committee and even Louise Day Hicks, first elected in 1961 to "keep politics out of education" and not yet identified as a foe of desegregation, was conciliatory and set up a hearing for June.

At about the same time, a group of black and white civil rights activists, the Massachusetts Freedom Movement, was organizing a demonstration in support of civil rights workers in Birmingham who were being brutalized by Birmingham Police Chief "Bull" Connor. Composed of young liberals and radicals who had organized picket lines against Woolworth's as part of a national boycott, the Massachusetts Freedom Movement called for a one-day boycott of the schools to protest the poor education that black children were receiving. But as word got around about their plans, Edward Brooke, then State Attorney General, and Governor Endicott Peabody intervened to stop the demonstration. They won a promise that the boycott would not be held if the School Committee was responsive at the hearing.

The hearing was held June 11, 1963, and different groups were able to present their criticisms of the schools. The prepared reports and the comments documented the inequities of de facto segregation. CORE and the Citizens group emphasized differences in expenditures for predominantly black and predominantly white schools, and documented discrimination against black teachers and administrators. Six of the nine predominantly black elementary schools were overcrowded; for instance, one school with a capacity of 690 had an enrollment of 1043, and another with a capacity of 300 had an enrollment of 634. The average cost per pupil in Boston's elementary schools was $275.47, but in one largely black district the average was $238.05, and in another it was $228.98. As of 1963, there had never been a black principal in Boston, and there had been only one

black administrator. Only 40 of the 2000 teachers were black.

The NAACP presented fourteen demands. The first one called for "immediate public acknowledgment of the existence of de facto segregation". While the School Committee acknowledged some problems resulting from de facto segregation, a majority refused to agree with the bald statement itself. Because of the unwillingness of the School Committee to acknowledge de facto segregation, the boycott took place on June 19, 1963. About a quarter of the black students stayed out; over half of the junior and senior high school students boycotted. Following the boycott there were attempts to confront the School Committee at its meeting and there was picketing at the Committee headquarters. The response of the School Committee was to propose that a committee more representative of the black community be set up to study the question. A bi-racial committee was set up, but before long its black members quit, saying they did not want to be Uncle Toms. As a result, the School Committee was forced to call another meeting but within minutes it was gavelled to a close by Hicks because a majority of the BSC refused to discuss de facto segregation. Picketing continued throughout the fall.

The summer of 1963 saw the development of clear intransigence on the part of the majority of the School Committee. During this time Hicks changed her line and used latent racism in conducting a victorious re-election campaign that fall. Of all the candidates, she received the most votes. Since 1963 race has been the primary political issue in the Boston schools.

THE RACIAL IMBALANCE LAW

In February 1964 there were nation-wide one-day boycotts of the schools to protest the poor quality of education for black students. In New York and other cities hundreds of thousands of students stayed out for the day. Over 20,000 supported the boycott in Boston, and many of them attended freedom schools that had been set up for the day. This boycott, along with more informal pressure, led Governor Pea-

body to call for a blue-ribbon committee to study discrimination in the state's schools. This study was presented in April 1965. It found that of 55 schools in the state that were predominantly black, 45 were in Boston. It also stated that this imbalance was harmful to both black and white children. The findings were accepted by the succeeding Governor John Volpe, the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston (Cardinal Cushing had been a member of the committee). Its recommendations included two-way busing of both black and white students, and suggested that there be legislative action.

Volpe proposed legislation to deal with de facto segregation, and the Racial Imbalance Law was enacted in August 1965. Racial imbalance was defined as a "ratio between nonwhite and other students in public schools which is sharply out of balance with the racial composition of the society in which nonwhite children study, serve, and work." The Law gave the state the power to direct school committees to come up with plans for desegregation, to review and revise those plans, and to withhold state funds if necessary to enforce its decisions. The Law specifically stated, however, that desegregation plans could not involve busing students outside of their school districts if their parents objected. In other words, the Law demanded desegregation, but undercut the most effective short term solution.

BLACK PARENTS CREATE NEW PROGRAMS

After the passage of the Law, there was a lull in activities directed against the Boston School Committee. In part there was a wait-and-see attitude given that the state now had the legal power to move. In part there was a lull because of the declining strength of the NAACP after the early 1960's. But there was not a lull in activity around education within the black community itself. As early as 1962 the Northern Student Movement (NSM) and a number of churches in the Roxbury area set up after-school tutorial programs. These programs were begun in a number of Northern cities in the early 1960's by the NSM, a group that formed to support black civil rights activities in the

Signs painted on South Boston High School the night before busing began. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX

South and to deal with the problems of segregation and inequality in the North. In the space of two years about 2,000 students made use of the programs set up by NSM and the churches. Beyond the help that the students received, these activities provided an arena within which some of the NSM leaders gained skills and recognition; today many of the former leaders of NSM in Boston have become leaders of Boston's black community. Another result of the tutorial programs was that they provided a place for parents to get together, to meet one another, and to discuss the educational alternatives open to them.

In the fall of 1965 Operation Exodus began. Ellen Jackson, a parent at the Gibson School, organized a boycott of classes to protest conditions in the school. This was the same school described in DEATH AT AN EARLY AGE by Jonathan Kozol, who had been fired the previous spring. To dramatize their boycott, the parents took advantage of a recent decision by the School Committee. The School Committee had instituted a new program called the "Open Enrollment Policy", whereby parents could send their children to a school outside their home district if there was space for them in another school. Subsequently, the courts have recognized that this does not work to relieve school segregation: even if a large number of black parents make use of it, white parents do also, taking their children out of black schools and sending them to white schools, thus increasing segregation. But whatever the larger results of open enrollment, the parents who were boycotting the Gibson School found that their children were going to better schools. Taking advantage of the new policy, they decided to continue sending their children to the other schools. Out of this grew Operation Exodus, a privately organized busing plan that involved, in its first year, over 400 black students going to schools outside their own districts. The schools did not pay for this; hence the primary activity of the parents in Operation Exodus became that of fund raising. They held bake sales, made contact with suburban liberals, and in one way or another raised the $1200 to $1400 needed every week to keep their children going to better schools.

After much work, the parents won public funding to cover transportation costs. This permitted further expansion, peaking with about 1,100 students in 1969-70. The following year Operation Exodus dropped to about 170 students as other options became available.

Busing alone was not enough. The students involved encountered various kinds of discrimination. Some school administrators removed desks and chairs so they could argue that there was no room for a black student, but would have them replaced when a white student applied. There was some physical segregation of blacks within the schools, and at times they were stuck in the backs of classrooms. However, despite discrimination in the receiving schools, the general success of Operation Exodus — parents felt their children were in smaller classes and learning better — increased the pressure for more busing.

The following year (1966) another volunteer busing program was begun by older established liberals in the black community working with suburban liberals on the various school committees. Known as the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), it bused black students — elementary through high school — from the city to the wealthier suburban schools. Today there are about 2,500 students involved and there are ten applications for every opening in METCO. Like Operation Exodus, METCO won federal funding and a foundation grant, so that neither the parents nor the suburban communities have to bear the costs of the program. The Boston School Committee did not attack the program because it did not affect Boston's white schools.

In the winter of 1965-66 some parents with children in tutoring programs at Roxbury's St. Ann's Church began discussing the possibility of starting their own school. They were soon joined by some parents from the Gibson School. The group split over the role of outside professionals and whether the school was to be for the neighborhood or for the larger community. The split followed along class lines with the slightly poorer parents from St. Ann's in favor of less professional influence and more local emphasis. The Gibson School parents opened the New School for Children with a professional staff earning good salaries; the St.

Ann's parents opened the Roxbury Community School with fewer outside experts, parents sometimes serving as teachers, and more of a neighborhood flavor. Both of them have raised thousands of dollars. They, along with Roxbury's third black community free school — the Highland Park Free School, started in 1968 — got a Ford Foundation grant of $500,000 and $175,000 from a group of local foundations. Together these three schools have been important in Boston as a focus of support, and beyond Roxbury have been able to attract liberals and innovative educators because the teaching and learning styles encouraged there are seen as models.

While most people active at this time were in the parents' groups, the Black Panther Party was setting up in Boston, as in other cities, a free breakfast program for children. In some of the poorer housing projects in the city, the Panthers fed hundreds of children before school every morning. Although they did not gain as much support in Boston as in other cities, their program served as a model which was picked up by other groups including some city schools, which were shamed into giving breakfasts.

Operation Exodus, METCO, and the free schools provided several alternatives to the neighborhood public schools for a number of black students. But the overwhelming majority of black students remained in schools that were run-down, poorly maintained, under-staffed, and under-supplied. The next wave of protests came from within these schools.

PARENTS AND STUDENTS ORGANIZE SCHOOL BOYCOTTS

Between the fall of 1968 and the spring of 1971, parents or students organized boycotts or walk-outs in a number of schools. For instance, on the first day of school in the fall of 1968 a group of parents at the Gibson School demanded that the newly-appointed principal resign. She refused, and parents claimed the school as their own and installed their own principal. When the parents were locked out of school the next day, they took their children to a nearby community center and were joined by several teachers who had

helped to start the group. The teachers were fired; but they and the parents ran a liberation school that lasted a couple of months. It started with all 600 of the students in the school, and even after two months of harassment by the school officials, welfare department, etc., there were still 85 children whose parents refused to let them go back to Gibson. Some of them went to the New School for Children, some went into METCO or Operation Exodus. The Gibson School has generated so much parent involvement because it is one of the worst schools in Boston. But there were boycotts and pressures from parents at other schools as well. For instance, at two of the junior highs in Roxbury parents got together to demand that black headmasters be appointed. They were successful, even though the appointments took place only at the last moment, right before the beginning of school in the fall of 1968.

These pressure groups and boycotts were not organized by existing groups in the Boston community. The NAACP was weak in Boston at this time, and the Urban League also lacked a base. Rather, these boycotts were organized by indigenous groups, and influenced by the national growth of black liberation and black nationalist groups and ideologies.

In the high schools, the initiative was taken by the black students themselves, not by their parents. From 1968 through 1971 there were sporadic boycotts of schools by black high school students. They formed black student groups within the high schools, and slowly organized a loosely-structured union of black students, the Black Student Union. These boycotts were like the earlier ones: started by a few students, but once underway gaining wider support. In 1968, for example, a student was suspended from English high school by the principal for wearing a dashiki, a violation of the dress code. Black students walked out, joined by some white students. Similar boycotts occurred sporadically for the next two years.

In February 1971, the Black Student Union organized a city-wide boycott to protest racial segregation in the schools. They walked out and presented five demands to the School Committee: 1) recruit black teachers; 2) recruit black guidance counselors; 3) commission an independent study of racial patterns in the city's schools; 4) end ha-

rassment of black students; and 5) grant amnesty to all striking students. John Craven, Chairman of the School Committee, called the BSU statement "outlandish", and as usual the BSC made no concessions. The strike failed to attain its demands, but in other ways it clearly won a great deal. Many black students got experience in organizing; they allied with and got support from the Student Mobilization Committee; they held public hearings; and they even got support from white students who went out on strike. From April until the end of school in June, it was a black-led student boycott with blacks and whites protesting the racism and poor conditions of the schools.

COMMUNITY CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS

Out of the community schools, the parent boycotts, and the student boycotts — and out of the national interest in community control — community control of schools became an issue in Boston. In the 1971 and 1973 School Committee election campaigns a black woman and member of the Communist Party, Patricia Bonner-Lyons, ran on a community control platform. Although the CP did not have a sizeable following in Boston generally or in Roxbury in particular, Bonner-Lyons did well. In the first election she polled over 50,000 votes and almost won; in the second she ran less successfully, but still did well in Roxbury. At first members of the BSU were not active in her campaign; but as their strike ended and she was clearly a better alternative than any of the others, some people in the BSU worked for her.

The unsuccessful Bonner-Lyons campaigns did not spell the end of concern for community control. From the early 1970's through to the election of November 1974, it was one way that black parents sought to change the schools. Community control has also been supported by Mayor Kevin White, a liberal Democrat, and many of the white professionals who are also eager to take power away from the School Committee. A variety of community control plans were voted on in this year's primary elections. In the November elections the voters were given a choice of con-

tinuing with the School Committee or doing away with it, creating several community committees, and giving power to the Mayor's office. The plan was defeated overwhelmingly, and the BSC was retained.

In March of 1972, while some blacks were working on community control, a group of black parents supported by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund brought a case against the BSC in Federal District Court to challenge the continued and increasing segregation of the schools. It was this case that finally resulted in the June 21, 1974 decision by Judge W. Arthur Garrity Jr. in which he ordered that the School Committee begin the first stage of school desegregation in September 1974. It had been clear for at least two years that Garrity would decide in favor of the plaintiffs, and that he would order desegregation. In doing so he was not taking a particularly courageous stance, but was following the logic of Northern school desegregation cases that has been established in the past few years.

THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Unlike other city school systems that then prepared to cooperate with the court order, the Boston School Committee has continued to act in a high-handed racist way, and continues in its efforts to foil parents and state and federal officials in developing a good plan.

Why has the School Committee played this role for the past decade? What are the sources of its power? We will consider these points as well as how it has perpetuated and deepened the patterns of racial segregation in the city and how it has worked in every way it could to frustrate the plan now being implemented.

The present organization of the Boston School Committee dates back to 1949, when it was reorganized by the State Legislature, controlled by Yankees. The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts — as with all states — gives the state the power to grant charters to cities; it also gives the state the right to review and annul local laws. The Legislature ruled that there be five at large members, all of whom serve two-year terms, and that they run as non-

partisan candidates in elections held in odd-numbered years. Whatever the original thoughts of the Yankees in the State Legislature, the city-wide elections have helped the Irish and other white candidates, and prevented any black from ever being elected.

In its heyday the Irish machine could mobilize support through its patronage power, and the schools were and are part of this. There are managerial, teaching, and janitorial jobs within the schools; there are the contracts for building and repairs in the schools. Over the years members of the School Committee have had relatives and in-laws who worked as teachers or administrators in the schools. There is evidence that the School Committee has raised the salaries for certain jobs and then received large campaign pledges from people in those jobs. Testimonial dinners are given for Committee members, and teachers are pressured into buying costly tickets. Thus, even with one-third of the students of the city in parochial schools, the school system had an importance far beyond its educational function. With the general decline of the machine its vestiges have been able to regain control of the School Committee.

In a larger context the School Committee represents "local" capitalists in their resistance to "national" capitalists. The Committee, through such current and past members as Hicks and Kerrigan, has links to local real estate and banking interests. As small owners they, and the people they represent, do not have the capital for urban renewal schemes, and they have opposed the attempts of the larger banks, the insurance companies, and the university and state managers to restructure the city. On the other hand, they use racism — as do the big banks when useful — to keep housing patterns clearly delineated by race. Because of the two-way relationship between school integration and housing integration, they have used the schools to keep blacks not only out of the schools, but out of certain sections of the city as well.

The Boston School Committee grasped onto the issue of race in the Spring and Summer of 1963 as a political rallying point. Since then the opposition to black demands for better schools has been, in part, a ploy on the part of demagogic politicians to hold on to their political strength

through racist populism. The School Committee and its supporters — particularly home owners — have fought against desegregating the schools because of the fear of "white flight". Time and again the BSC and its supporters have scored points in blasting the suburban liberals who urge integration while not experiencing it themselves. Recent marches and demonstrations have also gotten support from white working-class suburbanites who want to defeat busing now to prevent the possibility of metropolitan busing, and also to keep blacks down in the ghetto and out of the suburbs.

HOW THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE FIGHTS DESEGREGATION

The School Committee has gone about its racist business in a number of different ways. Its members have used racial slurs in their electoral campaigns. For instance, in 1965 Committee member Joseph Lee — who happens to come from an upper-class Yankee background — said that "white children do not want to be transported into schools with a large portion of backward pupils from unprospering Negro families who will slow down their education.... White children do not want large numbers of Negro pupils from unprospering Negro families shipped into their mainly white schools...." And in the same year Louise Day Hicks said, "We have in our midst today a small band of racial agitators, non-native to Boston, and a few college radicals who have joined in the conspiracy to tell the people of Boston how to run their schools, their city, and their lives."

Since 1965, when the Racial Imbalance Law was being considered, the School Committee has focused on busing. At first the NAACP and the Citizens for Boston Schools denied that they were for busing either. But Hicks and the others kept denouncing busing as they sensed the growing political support for that issue. When the school superintendent wanted a minor busing program in the fall of 1965 to relieve overcrowding in a black school by transferring some students to a white school with room, the School Committee rejected the proposal, even though busing had

been used in the past to deal with overcrowding. Furthermore, the School Committee had used busing to MAINTAIN segregation. In 1972 it was revealed that black children were being bused past white schools with room for them, and white students were being bused past black schools with room for them.

In hiding these facts, the School Committee, along with many others, has helped to foster myths about busing. In fact, there has been a steady increase in the number and percentage bused to and from school. With the rise of larger schools with more varied curricula, more and more students have ridden buses to school. Presently in the U.S. about 43% of all school children go to school on buses, but only 3% of students are bused to relieve racial imbalance. In Boston about one-third of the students in public schools are already bused or are using public transportation to go to special high schools or to new "magnet" schools that are meant to attract students from throughout the city. Similarly, the Boston School Committee has harped on about the sanctity of neighborhood schools when, in fact, many of the district boundaries are drawn, not along natural boundaries, but artificially so as to maintain racial segregation in the schools.

The School Committee has consistently furthered racial segregation in the Boston schools. In 1965 there were 45 racially imbalanced schools. By 1973 there were 68. In part this increase is due to the growth of the black population within the context of segregated housing. This results in de facto segregation. But Judge Garrity — following recent court decisions about similar situations in other large cities — agreed that there was de jure segregation as well. For example, he found that the BSC intentionally furthered racial segregation by allowing some schools to become overcrowded while leaving others with extra space; by making use of portable classroom facilities to avoid transferring students; and by opening new schools in such a way as to further racial segregation. He found that the BSC drew school district lines in such a way as to perpetuate racial segregation. He found that the patterns of feeding students into the high schools were developed with the intent of maintaining segregation. Open enrollment and

Police push back anti-busing demonstrators on the street across from South Boston High School on first day of school. Photo: Ken Kobre, Boston PHOENIX

transfer policies were managed with a "singular intention to discriminate on the basis of race". Staff and faculty were distributed in the school system in such a way that the predominantly black schools had the less-qualified people.

The School Committee has also fought desegregation in other ways. It has withheld information and only released it under threat of a court order. For example, the Board of Education, in drawing up the current desegregation plan, were not able to get the school-related demographic statistics they needed, and the BSC had to be forced to release them. Even then they did not provide all that was needed. The BSC has also prepared "desegregation" plans that wouldn't alter racial patterns. It has even tried to resubmit such plans after they have been rejected by the state. It has tried to count as part of its "desegregation effort" the independent actions of black parents in Operation Exodus and METCO. As a consequence of this intransigence the city has lost millions of dollars because state and federal governments determined that the school committee was in violation of the law.

By December 1973 — half a year before the Garrity decision — forces were converging on the School Committee in such a way that it was obvious it would lose its court cases. The BSC's attorney, James St. Clair — before going on to represent Nixon — told them that "All legal avenues had been exhausted" and that further appeals would be "frivolous". The Committee, never having made any preparations for school integration, then began to stall and ask that the implementation date be put forward to September 1975. Over the summer the School Committee did nothing to prepare the school administrators, teachers, or parents for the desegregation plan this fall. It held no public meeting to explain how the plan would work; it held no workshops for administrators or teachers or students on how to deal with the upcoming situation.

One of the consequences of the BSC's racist intransigence is that the plan drawn up by the State Board of Education and ordered to be implemented by Garrity is a very poor one. In the first stage of the integration plan not all students in all parts of the city are involved, and this has caused a lot of bitterness on the part of many white parents

who are now involved. The plan has also faltered because Garrity has not become involved in the intricacies of the plan, and often appears to concerned parents and teachers to be making decisions by fiat.

There is also considerable opposition to this particular busing plan among blacks, because of the dangers it presents for many black students and teachers. But since school started most blacks have rallied to defend the rights of black students to be bused safely. There are various groups and individuals — in and out of government positions — who have monitored buses, bus routes, and schools. The Black Caucus (of state legislators) led a black demonstration demanding protection for black students. In the primary elections the one black politician who endorsed Governor Sargent's compromise voluntary busing plan was soundly defeated for the State Senate nomination by Representative Bill Owens, a supporter of mandatory busing and an outspoken critic of the racists in Boston city government.

THE HOME AND SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

The School Committee has worked to mobilize support for its racist policies in a number of ways. Its members have continually spoken out in a variety of forums in which they could whip up racist sentiments and opposition to busing. But they have also organized support for their position, and have stifled opposition. In Boston there is no PTA. Instead there is a "Home and School Association", whose bylaws prohibit it from criticizing the School Committee or the School Department.

The Home and School Association acts as a front organization for the School Committee. For the past several years it has not really concerned itself with any educational issues beyond the maintenance of segregation. The Home and School Associations exist only in white or partly white areas. Liberals who have tried to raise educational issues or have questioned racist orthodoxy have found their attendance at meetings discouraged. In some areas the school

principal has even appointed the parent head of the organization.

With this close relationship to the school administration, the Home and School Association has used school supplies, duplicating machines, mailing lists, and other material and information to publicize anti-busing demonstrations. Furthermore, the School Committee has directed principals to use the teachers, through their homeroom classes, to act as conduits for informing parents of anti-busing rallies and demonstrations. In at least one instance the students were supposed to return notes from their parents if they wanted rides. These notes were then passed from the teachers' hands back to the principal, who would see to it that parents got rides to the demonstration.

The Home and School Association is now entrenched in block-by-block organizations in several white sections of the city. Using phone chains and word of mouth, the Home and School Associations act as the organizational base through which hundreds of people can be turned out to demonstrate within hours. Like most community-based organizations and like most organizations concerned with schools and children, the Home and School Associations are predominantly controlled and run by women in the neighborhood.

This fall we have mostly heard about the Irish stronghold of South Boston. South Boston is a virtually all-white area : it can have a good block organization without having to skip over or worry about the presence of black families in the area. In Hyde Park, another area with a lot of racial violence this fall, and where the white home owners have voted overwhelmingly for the racist candidates, the Association is not as strong because of the presence of black families in the area. With the recent decision by Garrity that next fall all of Boston will be involved in the integration plan, the Home and School Association is now organizing in other sections. There are now eight anti-busing information centers operating in areas of Boston and nearby suburbs. These centers are part of the effort to defeat integration, and provide little other "information". For instance, when parents phone with a question about occurrences in the schools, they are told that they were warned that integra-

tion would not work and they should keep their children at home until the busing plan has been defeated.

In the last year an umbrella organization known as ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights) has emerged. ROAR puts forward the calls for motorcades, rallies, demonstrations, boycotts, etc. This group holds its weekly meetings in the City Council chambers, and may have been organized by Louise Day Hicks, now a City Councillor, to replace the School Committee as the organizational center of anti-busing activity in case the BSC was enjoined from taking part in these racist mobilizations.

The strategy of the School Committee, the Home and School Association, and ROAR is to defeat the busing plan, and they think they can win. There have been anti-busing rallies and demonstrations for years, but since last spring there has been a marked increase in activity. In February and March there were large meetings to protest the busing plan and to organize protests against the Racial Imbalance Law. Hicks spoke at a meeting in South Boston, and Kerrigan spoke in Hyde Park. In April thousands demonstrated against busing in front of the State Capitol.

One of the few groups that gave concrete support to the desegregation plan was the Boston Teachers Union. While it did not do much, its leadership supports the plan. The current leadership of the union, in fact, is a reform group that organized in the fall of 1968 when the BTU did not support the teachers fired from the Gibson School. Now, more liberal than many of the members of the union, the BTU leadership has been cautious about confronting the racist sentiments of the teachers.

With only a modest effort by the BTU and the concerned but minor efforts of a black and white reform group called City-Wide Education Coalition, the racists have been the main force this fall. They began the year with a boycott of the schools which kept overall school attendance down in the whole city for several weeks. By mid-November attendance was normal at most schools, especially at the elementary level, but at several high schools not many white students are attending. Beyond the boycott, there have been weekly Sunday rallies with ROAR speakers, local state representatives, and a local popular radio talk show host. Some

rallies are planned to draw in support from sections of the city to be affected next year. They also draw support from white working-class suburbs, many of whose residents have only recently moved out of South Boston or some other white or transitional area.

CONCLUSION

In short, the issue in Boston today is racism. It is not only the institutional racism of capitalist job and housing markets and the hypocritical racism of the suburban liberals who control the state government, but it is also the well-organized racism of the Boston School Committee and its white petit bourgeois and working-class supporters throughout the city. We have tried to point out that the racism of the School Committee is a direct outcome of the declining patronage machine which, through various exclusionary methods, is attempting to preserve the relative advantage of white workers over black workers in Boston's shrinking economy.

In fact, the kind of racism that holds center stage right now is organized racism in several of Boston's white working-class neighborhoods. Because these neighborhoods suffer from high unemployment, poor housing, and lousy schooling, it has been tempting for liberal journalists and leftist groups alike to explain away white working-class racism as a product of "lower-class frustration", "backlash" or "manipulation" of various kinds. But it is wrong to explain racism away by romanticizing the ethnic pride and community solidarity of neighborhoods like South Boston (which in fact contain real divisions), or by resorting to a conspiracy theory that explains away racism as a frustrated response to a ruling-class plot in the form of busing.

We have tried to show that busing is, in fact, the result of a determined civil rights drive fought on a national level and an equally determined drive which Boston blacks have launched for better education on a local level. The racist resistance to the black battle against school segregation is no different from the ongoing fight to keep blacks out of white neighborhoods with decent housing or to keep Third

World workers out of high-level white collar and blue collar jobs.

In Boston, this resistance has been mobilized largely through the remnants of the old patronage machine, represented by appendages like the Boston School Committee and allies like the exclusionary AFL craft unions. It is part of a hard-fought defense of the relative privileges of white workers over black workers. These privileges are more significant in the areas of jobs and housing than in education, but racist leaders realize that if schools are desegregated, the blacks will have won an important victory against institutionalized racism and will have set a dangerous precedent.

Although the old patronage machine has lost much of its power since Curley's time, it still represents the last line of defense against black encroachments into the white world of Boston, into its segregated schools, jobs, and housing facilities. The Yankee capitalist class has seriously undercut the economic power of the old machine over the years, and the liberal Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party has deprived it of considerable power in the city, state, and federal government. As a result, the machine controls fewer jobs than ever before. In a metropolitan area with high unemployment and in a period of high inflation, the various leaders of the old machine, notably the Boston School Committee pols, have resorted more and more openly to organized racism as a means of intimidating blacks who challenge what control the old machine still has over jobs and public facilities in the city of Boston.

Busing has of course been a boon to these demagogic leaders of the old machine; it has enabled them to unite the white petit bourgeoisie of the city with large sections of its white working-class around a defense of the various material benefits segregation has preserved for them. These racist politicians know that the desegregation of schools is but the first battle in a full-scale assault working-class blacks will wage for equality in jobs and housing.

As long as these racist politicians control the School Committee, they will be able to maintain considerable working-class support by dispensing patronage jobs and by favoring predominantly white schools, but the very exist-

ence of the School Committee is being threatened by various black groups who have the support of liberal political leaders in City Hall and the State House. In fact, the total domination of the Democratic Party by the liberal wing led by White in City Hall, Governor-elect Dukakis in the State House and Kennedy in Washington, may force the old-line machine politicians to make some kind of formal split. A Northern Dixiecrat movement of this sort, led by Hicks and Kerrigan, would probably play right into the hands of the proto-fascist American Party, which did quite well in working-class districts of Boston during the last election.

In any case, the defeat of busing would strengthen the beleaguered School Committee and its racist leaders immensely and would therefore prolong the existence of the old patronage machine in many white working-class communities. The left in Boston, though not large, has made some inroads in working-class communities where the power of the old patronage machine has broken down. But the left has been totally insignificant in segregated areas like South Boston where the machine is still strong and helps to mute class antagonisms.

The defeat of busing would be much more than a defeat of the latest thrust black people have made to improve education; it would also be a serious setback to the general struggle against the kind of racism which divides the working class. Furthermore, the implementation of busing, as one means of breaking down an important form of segregation, is a victory not only for the black struggle for equality but also for the working-class struggle for unity.

First of all, the breakdown of segregation raises the possibility of black-white cooperation for better education, a phenomenon that has already occurred in more integrated sections of the city. In fact, there is already tangible evidence to show that the busing of white children to poor black ghetto schools has resulted in improvements within these schools which black parents were never able to achieve in the past. In other words, despite the obvious problems with this busing plan, it does create some limited possibilities for improving educational facilities for both black and white students.

The blow busing strikes at Boston's dual system of education also raises the possibility of the ultimate defeat of the old patronage machine and its overtly racist leadership. Although Hicks and Kerrigan, and others of their ilk, have received much national publicity of late (some of it quite favorable), they have failed to fulfill their promise to stop busing. This promise alone has accounted for much of their political appeal in recent years. And their political fortunes will probably suffer in the long run because of their failure to keep this promise. In fact, Hicks, Kerrigan, and other political leaders of the old machine have recently suffered defeat in their campaigns for higher office.

Although it is difficult to be optimistic about the short-term effects of the busing crisis in Boston, the following points should be noted: the racist defenders of segregation have suffered a major defeat; the powerful Democratic Party has been seriously divided and disrupted; and, most importantly, the solidarity of the black community in Boston has forced predominantly white community organizing groups to deal seriously with the issue of racism for the first time and has encouraged some segments of the left to organize what should be an important national mobilization and demonstration against racism in Boston.

Nevertheless, the immediate effect of the busing crisis has been to increase tension between black and white workers in this city. There is no way to deny this. No rhetorical calls for black-white unity around educational demands or broader political demands will erase this fact. White racism in Boston is a deep-seated and well-organized phenomenon, and it will not be uprooted easily. The only hope for working-class unity in Boston and other segregated cities lies in a direct assault on segregation in all its forms and in an organized defense against the racist attacks which segregation fosters.

Jim Green and Allen Hunter for the RA editors

Published by
New England Free Press
60 Union Square
Somerville, Mass. 02143

Write for free catalogue of radical literature.

This pamphlet is reprinted from RADICAL AMERICA, volume 8, number 6.

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