

Buses set to Roll This month

Busing Won't Change Authoritarian Schools

anon.

1976

“When I think back on all the crap I learned in high school; it’s a wonder I can think at all.”

–Paul Simon; “Kodachrome”

Trying to make sense of the busing issue is like the classic story of the blind men and the elephant—every piece you touch feels different and suggests a different definition. The trick is to make sense of the whole animal.

With January 26, 1976 designated as the starting date for the busing of Detroit public school pupils, the recent scenes in Louisville of racist mobs attacking buses carrying small black children and of Irish-American mothers publicly chanting Latin prayers to their god for segregation to be maintained at South Boston High, demand that we look at what can be expected in this city when busing begins.

Racism is an integral part of the American social structure and is something that, hopefully, does not have to be documented here. From their first arrival in the Americas as slaves, blacks have been subjected to complex forms of discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The structural system and its rationalization (“blacks are inferior”, etc.) make up what we call racism. It is both a system of ideas and material relationships.

The most insidious and pervasive racist idea held by whites is that blacks find themselves in disadvantageous social positions because of their own doing. Or, more insidiously, because of their biology.

That this flies in the face of the facts of over 350 years of chattel slavery and over 100 years of legal and extra-legal discrimination, violence and exclusion is ignored by those whites who find that the system of racism works to provide them with material advantages in jobs, housing, political power, and community prestige.

The result of racism in education has been the creation of a situation wherein residential segregation created by an active conspiracy of government agencies, realtors and financial institutions to keep certain neighborhoods white has also produced a dual school system with the substandard facilities relegated to the black neighborhoods.

The results in predominately black schools are well known: overcrowded classrooms, lack of textbooks and equipment, a climate of fear and violence—all of which produces a situation where reading comprehension levels of black high school graduates are closer to that of grade-schoolers and simple math skills are often non-existent.

Reaction to segregated, inferior schools is often individual resistance by black youth to the whole structure of ghetto schooling: truancy, resistance to the little learning that goes on, violence against teachers and administrators, vandalism, or simply a numbed non-response while attending class each day.

This reaction of black youth to a poor educational system and lack of job opportunity upon graduation reflects the larger anger at a blunting of the rising expectations held by the black population.

As blacks were permitted to join the industrial work force only because of the needs of the Second Imperialist War, they became less willing to exist as the sub-proletariat and demanded entrance to the mainstream of American society.

Education Seen As Key

When militant demands for equality broke out in full force during the 1960's many black organizations saw the key to success in America as obtaining the same capitalist education received by the dominant white population.

Although countless undocumented struggles occurred in black communities against poor facilities and racism in education, the most dramatic and well-noted are the multitude of lawsuits initiated by the NAACP challenging school segregation in both the North and South. In the 'seventies it has been the decisions from these suits which have resulted in the court-ordered busing which has been so violently resisted in northern and border state cities.

Busing, or "pupil transportation" as the moderate civil rights organization would rather call it, was developed as a strategy based upon the perception that whites have always provided a good education for their children and a substandard one for black children. A racial mix of students reflecting city racial patterns, they reason, would create a situation where white parents would never allow the atrocious conditions that prevail at Detroit inner-city schools while their children attend school there.

The main element of NAACP strategy is to use the coercion of the State through its power to make school assignments and then to have the armed power of the State protect those decisions through the use of the police and National Guard. That it is these same courts, laws and armed might that have been historically and currently used by racists to define blacks as slaves and then to suppress them as citizens strikes the NAACP as at best ironic.

The political shams of modern liberalism, social democracy and state socialism have created the illusion that problems can be solved by benevolent governments representing the interests of workers. Government (the State) as the perpetrator of class rule for the last 10,000 years, has been the cause of human misery in the untold millions. To suggest that the State can mediate human affairs is at best naive and at worst treacherous.

The capitalist State (and in this epoch, all governments which exist on the planet rule in the name of Capital) is the mortal enemy of all people who strive for a life based upon freedom, voluntarism, and human community. The only posture towards the State should be to advocate its destruction.

It then goes without saying that the State has no right to force anyone to attend school at all let alone a school where they do not choose to go. Conversely, anyone who decides that they want to attend school should be able to do so without interference or harassment.

Further, although one easily realizes why black parents are eager for the opportunity to create improved education settings for their children, what is rarely called into question is the nature of education itself within capitalism.

Authoritarian Training

Schools are the training ground which provide compliant, disciplined, work-oriented, patriotic, model citizens who are necessary to staff the compulsive relationships of everyday life. Just as the Catholic Church sanctified the social relationships and obligations of feudalism during the Middle Ages and made them appear "objective," so now does "modern" education do the same for capitalism.

From the compulsory attendance, to straight lines, bells, "no talking," passes for the bathrooms, dress codes, arbitrary and competitive grading systems, the obligatory patriotic observances, the fraudulent history, business-oriented math problems (the list is endless); all are designed to have us willfully reproduce Capital with us as its subjects.

The goal of the NAACP and other like-minded reformers is to create a situation where black children come out of authoritarian educational mills just like their white counterparts without a thought that an alternative is possible.

What would have made more sense is the creation of alternatives for all children based upon an education which stressed spontaneity and independence—an education which was set up by parents who were themselves rebels and were chilled by the fact that their children were being forced to go into institutions of authority at an impressionable age.

What we are left with on January 26 is the choice between two bad alternatives: On the one hand the busing/integration plan of the NAACP backed by the armed might of the State, and on the other, mobs of racists who would leave blacks in the same position as they are now.

To the extent that the racists mouth supposedly anti-government slogans about "freedom of choice," these must be seen as essentially phoney and opportunistic. Most of the reactionaries have submitted unquestioningly to authority and the right of Capital and the State to command every aspect of their lives and their sudden turn should only be seen as momentary.

Well, dreams of voluntary projects and revolution aside (we are too late again!), what is to be done when busing begins?

Fortunately the forces of racism in Detroit are not as organized as they are in Boston and Louisville (Mothers Alert Detroit (MAD), although heavily influenced by the violent, right-wing Breakthrough, in no way compares with the grassroots organized Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR), which is the spear' head of the anti-busing movement in Boston).

Also, in the other two cities blacks are a minority, both in the city and in the school system, whereas in Detroit the reverse holds true. In many schools here it is the black students who are the organized ones.

And in Detroit with a black mayor and a more heavily black-staffed police force, the city's commitment to protecting students from racist violence is considerably higher than elsewhere.

Key to this period, no matter how reformist it is, is the protection of black children and the black community from racists assaults such as have taken place in the other cities where busing has occurred.

It may mean only our public support for self-defense groups set up by people within the black community, or even our active participation in them. But ultimately we have to move beyond the phoney choice between segregated or integrated compulsory education in capitalist schools and start providing our own alternatives.

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