

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

Re *Busing: Education*

The Real Problems

THE ANTIBUSING amendment passed by the U.S. Senate doesn't help the nation deal with the problems of minority education. But neither does the reaction of Drew S. Days, chief of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division.

Days said his division will continue to file suits that seek court-ordered busing. "I don't think there's going to be a total pulling back," he said. "I can't imagine the next administration being so callous and so irrational as to turn its back on these problems that have been around for a long time, and have continued to plague us."

The idea that an aggressive pursuit of busing is an essential gauge of sensitivity and rationality seems to be typical of the liberal assumptions left over from the 1960s. Those assumptions need to be examined in terms of the experience of the past decade.

For years it was assumed with almost no debate that segregation was responsible for inferior education. Other widely-agreed-upon requirements for "quality education" included lower class sizes, more per-pupil spending and modern facilities. Along with desegregation suits, the federal government spent billions of dollars on "compensatory education" to provide minority students with the forms and structures, the materials and equipment, the research and "individualized" instruction that were thought to be capable of making up the difference between "advantaged" whites and "disadvantaged" blacks.

These were useful programs, but not because they solved all the problems. Their main usefulness was in helping to delineate what the problems actually were.

The central problem in minority education — or any education, for that matter — is that of teaching students to read and to think. This problem has been solved in many schools in different parts of the nation. The solutions, however, haven't depended on the size of classes or budgets or the amount of desegregation.

Thomas Sowell, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution on the Stanford University campus, writes in the fall issue of *Taxing and Spending*, "A growing literature has shown numerous ghetto schools with good academic performance, often among children either wholly unselected, or differing in no demonstrable way from other ghetto children. One example which I studied was P.S. 91 in Brooklyn, where over half the children were eligible for the free-lunch program and many were on welfare. Yet whole grades were reading above the national norms, and the school's performance was far above the performances of the other schools in the same school district."

Laws that enforced segregation were anathema to American principles and poisonous to a free society. Desegregation, moreover, is desirable because it's important for people from different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds to learn to live and work together; it's important to break down the barriers of racial misunderstanding and hostility. But that isn't the legal basis for busing, which was approved by the U.S. Supreme Court as a tool that in some cases would have to be used to provide equal educational opportunities. The success of minority schools, even in urban ghettos, undermines the assumption that busing is necessary for strictly educational purposes.

The poor performance of many schools involved in busing plans also breaks down that assumption, and suggests that other causes of inferior education and proven ways of attacking those causes should receive more attention.

WHAT IS NEEDED — and what the administration of President-elect Ronald Reagan will be looked on to provide — is a fresh and earnest effort to develop better ways to achieve the goals for which busing was supposedly designed. The Justice Department's Drew Days is right when he says the country shouldn't "pull back." But neither should it try to go forward with strategies and policies that haven't been productive and don't even address the real problems.

OPE 05-03

Cut these apart.
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2-page "spread" and "WLB" cartoon!

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sent: "I do not be-
to censor its em-
-ation on the basis
-amental to vital
-uch wide-ranging
Security policy.

...nation's work force will be employed in
-manufacturing. That's half of the figure for
1920.
By the year 2025, she adds, "It should
-drop to about 18 per cent, but probably not
-much more. At some point, it has to
-stabilize."
Union membership is declining in step
with manufacturing.

...man for the Communications Workers of
-America, which has coped effectively with
-rapid automation longer than most unions.
"But today's workers have a different
-outlook than Depression and post-Depres-
-sion babies," Miller says. "They are less will-
-ing to put up with demeaning conditions."
So far, however, little of this mood has

Ed. Clemente