

viewed as a metaphorical neutron bomb, which will leave college buildings standing, while annihilating their inhabitants.

With a system of institutional injustice like segregation, the degree of bitterness that accompanies its fall is directly proportionate to the effort put into the last-ditch defense of a hopeless cause. Ultimately, the system can be purged, and in much of the South, segregation now seems like a distant nightmare. There was a delicious symbolic moment when George ("Segregation Forever") Wallace won reelection as governor of Alabama with heavy black support and regularly appeared at black churches and social events. The higher education world can similarly free itself, but it will take decades, and the first step is to acknowledge the possibility that change must come, and come soon.

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Abolishing Compulsory School Attendance Laws

by Aaron Steelman

The state of Colorado recently did something revolutionary, at least it tried to. Last November, Republican State Representative Russ George introduced an amendment to Colorado's "Children Code"—a set of laws dealing with child welfare issues, including the education of Colorado's 650,000 students—that would have abolished that state's compulsory school attendance laws. A similar proposal was introduced in 1976 by Representative Tom Tancredo, now president of the Independence Institute, a pro-market public policy organization in Golden, Colorado.

George—most emphatically not an ideologue—proposed the amendment for one simple reason: he simply believes the compulsory schooling laws are not doing what they were intended to do. Instead of bringing valuable education to all, they have, in George's opinion, actually produced generations of children whose education can be described as

mediocre at best. The many students who come to school interested in learning suffer from the presence of disruptive students who would rather be anywhere else than in the classroom, and who, without the compulsory attendance laws, would be. Teachers spend too much time dealing with these troubled students and too little time doing their primary duty: dispensing knowledge, says George. Defending his position, he stated: "The real question we're asking ourselves is 'Where do we focus our attention?' Do we focus it on the good kids or on the bad kids? So often the bad kids get a higher degree of attention and dollars. We need to ask ourselves, is that a price that's too high to pay? It's dragging down the quality of education for so many others. If I have to choose, I choose in favor of the kids who want to be in school and who want to learn. I don't know that public schools get any better when you turn them into places of detention."

Others were less narrowly utilitarian in their support of the amendment. When asked her opinion on the issue, Republican State Representative Jeanne Adkins asked: "Is it society's role to force kids to stay in school?" And Tom Tancredo added: "The dumbest thing we do as a society is to say we value education and then say we'll put you in jail if you don't accept it."

Of course, many disagreed. The Democratic Senate Minority Leader, Mike Feeley, said: "We don't throw away children in Colorado, and we think that is exactly what this effort is." Assistant House Minority Leader Diana DeGette called George's idea "a step back into the 18th century." And Lynn Simons, the U.S. Education Department's regional representative, labeled it "a terrible idea, an abandonment of children and gross societal neglect."

As a result of such attacks by fellow legislators, editorials in the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Post* denouncing the idea, and a few Republicans waffling at the last moment, George's amendment was killed in the House Judiciary Committee on February 20. State Representative Vicki Agler, one of the pivotal committee Republicans who in the end sided with the state and federal departments of education, stated that she had voted against it so that the public debate could be refocused "on other important parts of the bill."

In retrospect, it is not surprising that

George's amendment failed. People who share their federal colleagues' opinion that balancing the federal budget in seven years is unduly rash are unlikely to repeal any significant law or statute with one stroke of the pen. But why did it provoke such bitter outrage by some legislators? Because, if passed, it would have cut to the heart of their ability to run their constituents' lives.

The entire corrupt system of government schools is dependent upon the compulsory attendance laws; repeal these laws, and the government schools will wither. Without compulsory attendance laws, the state would no longer be able to define what is and what is not an "acceptable" school. Parents who choose to homeschool their children would no longer have to submit "credentials" and "progress reports" verifying their ability to instruct their own children, and schools that employ unorthodox methods—such as rejecting the egalitarian approach employed by most public schools that all children are intellectually equal and hence should be educated uniformly—would no longer be terrorized by state accreditors. A myriad of new options would be opened to those parents who had not wanted to send their children to government schools but who, due to governmental regulation, were forced to. Those schools that truly work would flourish, and those that proved inefficient—is there any question as to which category government schools would fall into?—would eventually fall by the wayside. The state's role in education would be lessened dramatically, as would the horrid consequence of trusting the education of children to government.

From the inception, government schools were meant to inculcate certain "values" in their pupils. One such value was obedience to the present regime. As Murray Rothbard pointed out, "One of the most enthusiastic supporters of a public and compulsory school system was the 'Essex Junto,' a group of prominent Federalist merchants and lawyers in Boston hailing originally from Essex County, Massachusetts. The Essexmen were particularly eager for an extensive public school system so as to have the youth 'taught proper subordination.' For, as Essexman Stephen Higginson, a leading Boston merchant, put it, 'the people must be taught to confide in and reverence their rulers.'"

Other values that are now taught in

our public schools are more recent in origin, yet no less despicable. Sheldon Richman, the author of *Separating School and State*, has documented this disturbing trend all too well. "Despite the claim of moral neutrality," he writes, "public education is linked to a particular set of values, namely, the values of the modern welfare, or social-service, state. Those values include moral agnosticism (erroneously called tolerance), government activism, egalitarianism, 'welfare rights' to taxpayer largess, collectivism, and a watered-down version of socialism that looks much like the economic theory of the 1930's known as fascism."

In other words, do away with the state's compulsory attendance laws, and you do away with its ability to deceive most children into believing that mindless compliance with the government and its often wicked agenda makes them "good citizens." No wonder Russ George's single amendment engendered such a firestorm of dissent. It was a direct assault upon the well-being and future viability of the modern megastate.

Aaron Steelman writes from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Busing and Its Consequences

by William J. Watkins, Jr.

Ten years ago, federal district judge Leonard B. Sand ordered the city of Yonkers, New York, to integrate its public schools. Sand accused the city of 40 years of discrimination by concentrating public housing projects in southwest Yonkers. To comply with Sand's ruling, many neighborhood schools closed their doors as busing became de rigueur. Parents fought Sand's edict (at one point 11,000 students stayed home to protest) and eventually appealed to the United States Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case.

With neighborhood schools closing and Judge Sand's order to build low-income housing in more affluent areas, whites fled in the face of diminished control over their children's education, falling property values, and crime. Whereas Yonkers' public school system boasted 53 percent white enrollment in

1986, today the figure is a mere 30 percent.

Sand's prescription was questioned from the beginning, and now is even questioned by members of the local NAACP, the organization that started the mess by jointly filing suit with the Justice Department in 1980. The national organization, of course, will hear none of this and has suspended chapter president Kenneth W. Jenkins for publicly stating that "busing had outlived its usefulness."

This is not the first time the NAACP has run into opposition from within its own ranks on issues of school desegregation. Just last year in Cleveland, black parents resisted what the NAACP called "an old-fashioned" desegregation suit and the cross-district busing it promised. During the Board of Education's hearings on the matter, the majority of witnesses (black and white) spoke in favor of neighborhood schools. A local radio station conducted a poll and found that 75 percent of the adult respondents expressed a preference for neighborhood schools no matter what their racial composition. The NAACP acknowledged it was "swimming against the tide," but stuck to its guns despite the complaints of black parents that the civil rights lawyers were "holocausting" their children.

While members of the civil rights establishment predict dire consequences and a society that is "separate and unequal," local leaders and citizens see things differently. Just last fall, Judge Richard Matsch ended Denver's 21-year-old ordeal with forced busing and was praised by the city's officials, most of whom are black. Mayor Wellington Webb, once a proponent of busing, agreed with Matsch's decision, commenting that "the key issue today is to assure that kids receive the best education, regardless of what neighborhood they are in." The Reverend Aaron Gray, president of Denver's Board of Education, was more blunt in describing the change: "Pre-1954 was separate and unequal. The difference today is that you can step into an African-American school and see the same amount of resources provided to a majority Anglo school." On the same note, just south of Yonkers, the former principal of P.S. 111 in the Bronx told the *New York Times* that publicly sponsored integration efforts should be abandoned for the development of "communities of color where

social services, decent housing and real education are effectively delivered." He went on to boast that P.S. 111 outperformed all 31 of the predominately white schools in the district and ranked 26th of 631 schools in New York City.

The message of local black leaders and citizens is clear: while they oppose state-mandated segregation, they refuse to support schemes of social engineering that the national civil rights establishment continues to shove down their throats.

Moreover, the NAACP's influence continues to wane in the wake of charges of corruption and lavish expenditures on junkets, cars, and the like. With the dismissal of Ben Chavis in 1994 for a variety of reasons, not the least of which concerned NAACP funds earmarked as hush money for a woman alleging sexual discrimination, the organization is falling into disrepute—even among its staunchest supporters. As the old guard retires, they will be replaced with a new crop of leaders who are putting the health of their communities above quotas and formulas dreamed up by the social scientists who have already wreaked such havoc in the white and black communities.

It is heartening that lessons have been learned, but unfortunate that they were so costly, both in terms of dollars and human suffering. For example, in Yonkers, despite the opinions of the local NAACP, the city still spends \$13 million on busing alone. Add to this the original desegregation plan (\$37 million), and the result is one giant mistake at taxpayers' expense. Factor in the destruction of communities as families fled to areas that still possessed a modicum of self-government, and one gets an idea of the price of social engineering.

Of course one cannot feel too sorry for Yonkers, since the city dug its own grave by readily accepting federal housing money and the strings attached—one string being the threat of lawsuits if public housing was not racially dispersed. Nevertheless, the waste of tax dollars and the breakup of communities are lamentable occurrences. Now that all are realizing the importance of stable communities and schools, whether they are predominately white or minority, perhaps the era of *Brown* will finally come to a close. Consequently, communities in Yonkers and throughout the nation must now grapple with the task of rebuilding. It is a difficult task, but one