

EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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This monthly supplement is sponsored by the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. The editors of SR retain responsibility for its contents.

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Kicking Civil Rights Upstairs

IN BLOCKING the recent attempt by Republicans in the House of Representatives to channel more federal education funds through the states, the Administration won a significant political victory, not only for itself but also for the basic principles of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The Republican amendments to ESEA, embodied in proposals made by Representative Albert H. Quie of Minnesota, called for the allocation of federal funds through state agencies in the form of "block grants." Most funds now are given directly to local school districts for specific programs. If block grants had been made through the states, some of which are constitutionally prohibited from allocating funds to private and parochial schools, the church-state issue might well have returned to plague the very existence of the federal program. Equally important, it would have placed the major cities and their projects for disadvantaged children at the mercy of state education agencies which have often been less than sympathetic to the problems of the cities.

But the victory wasn't cheap. The price may well have been the end of the diligent enforcement of school desegregation in the Southern states. Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, United States Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II and his staff worked energetically to enforce school desegregation in those districts that have maintained dual systems for Negroes and whites. Since the act was passed more was accomplished in the Deep South than in the century preceding it, even if the achievements fell short of being revolutionary.

In the past two months, however, a series of administrative decisions under Congressional pressure have seriously weakened the muscle of the Civil Rights Act. Power to enforce the school desegregation guidelines, formerly in the Office of Education, has been centralized in the office of John Gardner, the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, partly, it was said, for the sake of administrative efficiency, but partly, without doubt, to appease Southern Congressmen to whom Howe and his colleagues had become anathema.

More important, in seeking to appease and line up Southern Congressmen, the supporters of the Administration who opposed the Quie amendment to ESEA have weakened not only the enforcement procedures established under the Civil Rights Act, but the policy itself.

During the past two years, the Office of Education demanded that heretofore segregated Southern districts increase the number of Negroes in previously all-white schools to demonstrate compliance with the law. In many instances so-called free-choice plans, under which Negroes could theoretically choose to attend white schools, were ruled insufficient unless Negroes actually went to school with whites. But these requirements were not imposed in the North where segregation had not been legally enforced. Now, in voting tentative approval for the continuation of ESEA, the House stipulated that: 1) hearings be held before funds are withheld from noncomplying Southern districts; and 2) that the Civil Rights Act be enforced equally North and South. The second of these changes, which touches the heart of

what many Southerners consider a double standard, also suggests the difficulty of distinguishing officially enforced segregation from the racial imbalance associated with de facto segregated neighborhoods. It indicates that once the laws requiring segregated schools are changed, the South is not so different from the North.

At the same time, however, the amendments may well have succeeded in chaining the difficult to the impossible. Although members of the HEW staff feel that enforcement of the Civil Rights Act will not be affected, the new amendments, if they are passed by the Senate, may return to haunt the Administration. Americans have committed themselves legally and morally to ending segregation enforced by administrative procedures or state law, but many have



never accepted the principle of federal action in promoting racial balance in the schools. Representative Edith Green of Oregon—a strong advocate of civil rights—who sponsored the idea of equal enforcement, and the House, which supported her suggestions, have therefore initiated something which is morally unassailable but politically pernicious. By tying the end of segregation in the South to the promotion of racial balance in the North, they may well have undermined both.

—P.S.

Letters to the Editor



Chicago Legacy

WHAT STRIKES the unknowing one about Charles and Bonnie Remsberg's article, "Chicago: Legacy of an Ice Age" [SR, May 20], is that Chicago apparently is one vast educational wasteland. It isn't the fact that such a one-sided viewpoint appears in print which is unusual, but that SR should condone and sponsor such an approach is somewhat appalling.

Let me deal with the allegation that there is virtually no innovation in the school system (a point obviously implied in the article's title). In the Official Report of the Proceedings of the Board of Education for February 23, 1967, are documented some forty specific projects impinging on all levels of the school system that have been effected under Title I of The Education Act. These projects illustrate the variety of approaches under way for two years and include, for example, smaller class sizes at the primary level, special health activities, parent involvement programs, cultural enrichment and outdoor education programs, expansion of paraprofessional help, and the extension of closed-circuit television networks. The summer education program in the Chicago public schools is one of the most extensive in the nation, meeting the needs of all enrollees from pre-school through the senior high school.

Yet there is no mention of these programs, services, and efforts in the aforementioned article. It is this total blackout of anything positive that is going on that leads one to question seriously the motives of the authors.

The authors make some basic points in discussing problems of financing, integration, and political structure. These are problems facing all major city school systems and have been projected honestly and candidly by Dr. Redmond and the Board of Education. Unfortunately, the article has cast these major issues in a drama of negativism and hopelessness. There are a great many of us who do not feel this way. We are committed to resolving our problems and moving ahead in the many directions that are already under way.

LLOYD J. MENDELSON,
Principal,

William R. Harper High School.

Chicago, Ill.

CHARLES AND BONNIE REMSBERG are to be congratulated on their incisive article about the Chicago public schools, but I was sorry to find that their article repeated a misquotation I had asked them to correct.

I do *not* believe, and have *never* said, that "Willis served the city's power structure." What I have said many times (including both orally and in writing to the Remsbergs) is that "Willis had somehow persuaded the city's power structure that he was serving them well, despite his divisive effect on the populace and his seri-

ously inadequate record of actual achievement."

The difference is no mere difference in words, but a critical matter of substance, not just to me but to the city as a whole. The sooner the business community understands that in actual fact Dr. Willis did *not* serve them, the sooner our public schools will be on the way to the excellence in education we all want to see.

I believe that Chicago's political leaders have, in the past, seriously underestimated the importance of good public schools to Chicago voters and have failed to recognize the often controlling influence our inadequate schools have had in accelerating the flight of middle-class residents to the suburbs. The business community, at the same time, has simply been misled, by Dr. Willis and by some Board members, into thinking that all was well with the Chicago public schools.

In Illinois, at least, a massive increase in school money is not likely to come until too late—and perhaps not at all—without the enthusiastic support of the business community. The first step in getting that support is, it seems to me, to point out to the businessmen of Chicago that Dr. Willis's cut-rate school system seriously damaged the city, and in doing so seriously damaged them. In other words, they were not *served* by the former general superintendent, they were *duped*.

JAMES W. CLEMENT,
Former member, Chicago
Board of Education.

Chicago, Ill.

BEN WILLIS was the finest superintendent Chicago has had, at least since 1930. Of course, after a leader is gone it is always *the thing* to blame him for everything. If [Philip] Hauser's ideas had been followed, there would be no white people left in Chicago.

No schools had been built for a generation when Willis arrived. His so-called poor schools were doing things a dozen years ago that are innovations in California now. Chicago's curriculum department is superb. The "fear" that teachers had is comparable to the "fear" that every child has for a good teacher; in some people it was envy of his pay.

Ben wasn't tactful, and he earned almost \$50,000. That's why they hated him. *And he ran a tight ship.*

FRED RESEK,
Former Chicago teacher.

San Diego, Calif.

CHARLES AND BONNIE REMSBERG denounce and denigrate Chicago's public schools and Board of Education by innuendo and implication rather than by factual statements. I disagree and resent this kind of reporting.

First of all, Chicago is not a segregated city. Nowhere is there any law or regulation (Continued on page 69)