This observer explains recent attacks on court-ordered busing as growing out of the basic fact that "desegregation works."

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission's 1976 report on desegregation begins its introduction this way:

Four years after the ... decision in Brown vs. Board of Education, the school bell summoned America to the spectacle of screaming parents and troops with bayonets at the ready, escorting nine black students to Central High School. ... "I tried to see a friendly face," declared Elizabeth Eckford, one of the nine. "I looked into the face of an old woman and it seemed friendly, but when I looked at her again, she spat on me." And then Elizabeth Eckford wept.¹

Two hundred and ninety-two pages later, in the summary chapter, this same report states:

There is one conclusion that stands out above all others: desegregation works. It is working in Hillsborough County, Florida; and Tacoma, Washington; Stamford, Connecticut; and Williamsburg County, South Carolina; Minneapolis and Denver, and in many other school districts where citizens feel that compliance with the law is in the best interest of their children and their communities. It is even working in the vast majority of schools in Boston and Louisville in spite of the determination of some citizens and their leaders to thwart its progress. The efforts of law-abiding citizens in these and other desegregating school districts are not well-known, although they are more representative of the total desegregation experience than the more publicized resistance of opponents.²


² Ibid., p. 293. (emphasis added, JSM)
about a greater degree of desegregation than would have existed if the school authorities had fulfilled their constitutional duties in the past. Justice Powell, joined by Rehnquist and Blackmun, gave the opinion that the standard indicated "would rarely result in the widespread busing of elementary children."

Newspapers around the country were quick to pick up on the potential this ruling has for reversing the progress made toward integration in many cities. The Chicago Daily News editorialized that "the high court's decision should please President Ford, who earlier this year had asked the Justice Department to search out school desegregation cases in which forced busing could be challenged." The Boston Globe wrote that the decision "signals a retreat by the court from broad desegregation plans and could be the first significant change since the landmark decision in . . . which the court found that a desegregation remedy must be applied to the entire city. . . ." The article goes on to say that the "Justice Department attempted last spring to use the Boston case on which to base a plea for more moderate desegregation plans. The attempt failed, and now the Justice Department is using Austin for similar purposes." The next day the Globe reported the opinion of attorneys for the Boston Home and School Association that the Austin decision "probably will affect future desegregation plans of U.S. District Judge Arthur Garrity." 10

The Dallas Times Herald editorialized on December 8 that the Austin opinion would tend to limit integration plans in Pasadena, California, as well as in Austin, and the Chicago Daily News gave the opinion that the views expressed in the Austin decision "could carry great signifi-

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3 Ibid., p. i.
4 Ibid., p. 308.
5 Ibid., p. 310-11.
7 Ibid., p. 920.
11 Dallas Times Herald, December 8, 1976. p. 2E.
cance for school officials in cities such as Wilming-
ton, Delaware, Indianapolis, and Dayton, Ohio, where forced busing orders are being fought, and in such cities as Louisville where officials be-
grudgingly have complied with such an order.” 12

Other newspapers suggest that the Austin deci-
sion might slow down the progress toward inte-
gration in such cities as Pontiac, Michigan, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

If, as the Civil Rights Commission contends, integration was working peacefully and smoothly in the vast majority of cases; if school officials found it educationally beneficial; if it is enjoying quiet acceptance by thousands of citizens in many cities; if a battle for human equality that spans several centuries is on the verge of consolidating an important victory; then why, just at this time, does the President seek and the U.S. Supreme Court grant a decision that threatens to turn this victory into a defeat? 13

To answer this question we have to under-
stand that it is primarily a political question and only secondarily an educational question. By this I mean that the attacks on integration in the form of attacks on busing can be understood best if they are seen as an expression of the political needs of certain interest groups rather than as an expression of convictions or concerns about the best way to achieve equal quality education for all.

Of course it is as true of the reactionary anti-
busing movement as it is of other reactionary movements that the fears of some honest people are exploited to win them to a cause that is not in their interest. But these people are among the victims of the antibusing forces, and are not its cause. Its cause is to be found in the profound crisis of U.S. capitalism. The connection between our economic crisis and the attack on busing has many ramifications, but its main lines can be summarized in the following six points:

1. U.S. capitalism is in a very deep crisis of overproduction that the capitalist class experiences as a crisis of falling profit rates. The tactics available to the capitalists to protect their profits are many, including the penetration and domination of the economies of smaller nations (for example, most of Latin America) and stepped up exploitation of colonial labor and colonial markets (for example, Puerto Rico). The tactic of immediate concern, though, is the passing on of the economic burden to the laboring classes in the form of lay-offs, speed-ups, unemployment, loss of real wages, inflation, cutbacks in services such as health care, sanitation, public housing, and education. These kinds of attacks on working people have always met with organized and militant resistance that grows more determined as the crisis deepens. The history of the building of the CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) is an example of the fruits of this kind of militancy. 14

2. As the other side of the story of working class militancy shows, the organized resistance of workers to having the burden shifted to their


13 Some people argue that an attack on what they call “forced busing” is not an attack on integration but only an attack on an undesirable means to a desirable end. Great confusion is caused by the term “forced busing.” The Commission report states that “the courts have not forced students to ride buses. Courts have required the boards of education to reassign students to schools so as to eliminate dual education systems. Buses are a convenience provided to the 7 percent who are reassigned just as they are a convenience to the remaining 93 percent of the students . . .” op. cit., p. 306. The attacks on “forced busing” in Pasadena, Pontiac, Wilming-
ton, Louisville, and Boston are knowingly attacks on integration masked as attacks on a straw man called “forced” busing.

14 See, for example: Philip Foner. History of the Labor Movement in the United States. New York: Inter-
backs has brought out the most vicious, and repressive, tendencies of the capitalists.

3. The basic strategy of reaction since the post-civil war period (that is, since the beginning of modern industrialization) has been to concentrate the heaviest attacks upon minority workers while at the same time stirring up “race-hatred” by blaming the crisis on minority workers (for example, the persistent lies that place the blame for New York City’s problems on “welfare chiselers” instead of on the banks that are milking the city dry) and by telling whites that it is the minority worker, rather than the capitalists’ own drive for profit, who threatens their jobs, standards of living, and political freedom. The deliberate setting of worker against worker has been a key strategy for successful intensification of the exploitation of all working people.15

4. The official blindness and unofficial support by the government and the wealthy to the illegal activities of groups such as the KKK, the American Nazi Party, the Posse Comitatus, and their spin-off groups such as Boston’s ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights), has enabled these groups to swell their ranks with the most disillusioned and the most degenerate people who are willing to perform the dirtiest dirty work of capitalism’s attack on minorities—the lynchings, rock-throwings, church-bombings, and bus-burnings with which the capitalist class chooses not to be openly associated.

5. As the Civil Rights Commission made clear, integration has worked in most cases, including the vast majority of schools in Louisville and Boston, “in spite of the efforts of some citizens and some of their leaders to thwart its progress.” Where integration through busing has been thwarted, it is not because black and white children cannot work and learn together harmoniously. Rather it has been prevented from working by conscious reactionary forces who want our people divided against each other as part of their strategy to protect their profits. The attacks on busing for the purpose of achieving equal quality integrated education are a part of this general strategy.

6. Integrated schools do not guarantee equal quality education for anyone. Integration has its own “second generation problems” as the Civil Rights Commission calls them.

These problems include classroom segregation, inequitable disciplinary procedures, low minority participation in extracurricular activities, lack of minority representation on administrative and teaching staffs,

15 This is well documented in Labor’s Untold Story, by Richard O. Boyer. New York: Cameron Associates, 1955.
and the absence of multicultural, bilingual education for minority-language students.\(^\text{16}\)

In addition, even when these problems are solved, there is still no guarantee that the quality of education will be as high as what we have a right to expect in this wealthy country. Even putting aside the Supreme Court’s own dictum that where public schools are concerned, under the conditions prevailing in our society, separate cannot be equal, we still must answer the question “under what conditions are we most likely to be able to achieve quality education? Under conditions of segregation or under conditions of integration?”

If we fail to consolidate the gains toward integration won by the civil rights movement over the past three decades; if we allow the forward motion toward integration to lose momentum and a backward motion toward segregation to get the upper hand; then, as the capitalists seek to bolster their profits with further cuts in services like education, the quality of education at the segregated minority schools will be attacked first, and the divisive and false belief will be propagated that one group can only gain at the expense of another. Then we will be fighting each other over who gets the bigger share of whatever inadequate resources the capitalist class chooses to make available for education.

If, on the other hand, we fight off the current attacks on busing and succeed at consolidating the gains in integrated education made over the past 30 years, then we have the basis for the united and thus irresistible demand for as high a quality of education as our country is capable of producing and for the united and thus irresistible demand that such a high quality of education be made available to all of our children equally. Then we can demand, for example, that adequate federal financing of public education be provided at the expense of the war industry, which at best produces dead-end products solely as a device for taking money from taxpayers and putting it into the pockets of war-industry capitalists, and at worst sends the sons of working people to places like Vietnam to kill and be killed for the sole purpose of protecting the investments and markets of the rich.

Busing, as a necessary part of the struggle for integration, is thus a political problem because the attack on it is an expression of the need the capitalist class has to protect its profits through political control of the lives and well-being of the great numbers of working people in our country. The Austin decision is only one incident in the overall pattern of attack. And while one may not want to believe that the Supreme Court consciously fulfilled such an undemocratic purpose, the case was initiated by the Justice Department at the request of President Ford with the express purpose of limiting court-ordered integration plans. And this is exactly what the court gave him. The courts can thus no longer be looked upon to remedy historic injustices, but only to correct specific willful acts of segregation where intent can be proved. In addition, President Ford also signed into law in 1976 a congressional bill prohibiting the use of federal financial assistance for student transportation for desegregation purposes, and initiated the School Desegregation Standards and Assistance Act of 1976, which “seeks both to narrow the definition of illegal segregation and to restrict the scope of remedies available to the courts.”\(^\text{17}\)

The context for these actions is not a nationwide nightmare of rock-throwing mobs as some would have us believe, but rather the Civil Rights Commission’s rather eloquent “one conclusion that stands out above all others: desegregation works.” The effort to discredit this conclusion was launched within days after the report’s publication, with phony allegations about the staff being compelled to write conclusions they didn’t believe. If my analysis is correct, we can expect more extensive, more deceitful, and more vicious efforts to dissuade us from the conclusion that “desegregation works.”\(^\text{17}\)

\(^\text{16}\) Op. cit., Desegregation of the Nation’s Public Schools, p. 299.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., p. 301.

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