

White parents shape antibusing campaign

Anne Kirchheimer

Boston Globe (1960-1979); Nov 24, 1974;

pg. A_3

White parents shape antibusing campaign

US District Court Judge W. Arthur Garrity's school desegregation order has caused drastic changes this year, not only in the Boston public schools but in the leadership structure of the city.

An article printed in last week's Sunday Globe Focus section reported that the Federal order affected the black community by forcing a "marriage of necessity" among black leaders and agency heads in order to ensure the protection of black students being bused to hostile white neighborhoods.

This week, The Globe examines shifts in power among white antibusing leaders, with parent activists now standing alongside or even in front of older, familiar political leaders, as the impetus behind the antibusing movement.

By Anne Kirchheimer
Globe Staff

Last April, antibusing activist Pat Ranese was all set to wage a rigorous campaign for South Boston Representative Michael F. Flaherty's legislative seat.

After getting her name on the November ballot, Mrs. Ranese reconsidered.

"I don't feel I could compromise," she explained. "Right now I can say or do what I damn well please. If I held an elected office I'd have to compromise. John Kerrigan is the only one I know who can get away with it (saying what he pleases) and there's only one John Kerrigan."

"I don't like to belong to anyone," said this mother of four. She calls Southie her first love although she moved to Lakeville, Mass., last weekend.

That Mrs. Ranese won't budge an inch on the busing issue, and that she is a parent herself, have made her one of the leaders of the antibusing movement in Boston.

Many parents are now taking overt leadership roles away from elected officials. They are keeping the movement going and even giving it new impetus. They organize the meetings, staff the phones and quell rumors while most of the politicians, with the exception of those looking into legal measures, merely make appearances at motorcades, rallies and some antibusing meetings.

A central rallying point for parents is an organization called ROAR (Restore Our Alienated Rights).

Mrs. Rita Graul of South Boston, who often chairs the ROAR meetings held weekly in the City Council chamber, said elected officials only come to the meetings, which are usually jammed with as many as 1200 persons, as invited guests.

Mrs. Graul said ROAR is working toward an amendment to the Constitution prohibiting busing, but it also functions as the primary unifying force for busing opponents in the city.

"Say, for instance, Hyde Park decides to have a motorcade and they want support from the whole city. They bring it up in a ROAR meeting and that's how things get going," said Mrs. Graul, who is Councilor Louise Day Hicks's secretary.

ROAR has launched so strong an antibusing campaign that it has gotten support of non-affected South Shore suburbs like Dedham and Quincy and areas of the city not so heavily impacted by busing, like Allston and Brighton.

Boston parents who don't want to bus their children and who feel frustrated by the lack of alternatives to the now-desegregated Boston public schools are putting their trust in parent leaders like South Boston's Rita Graul and Virginia Sheehy, Fran Johnenne of Hyde Park and Pixie Palladino of East Boston.

"Do you know why we're the leaders? When something happens we'll tell them the truth. We'll be there. If their children get hurt we'll cry with them," said Fran Johnenne, Hyde Park parent and



JOHN KERRIGAN

former regional representative of the Home and School Association.

Elected officials, especially Councilor Hicks and John Kerrigan, chairman of the Boston School committee, are still considered strong antibusing leaders, but their roles have changed. Many feel the antibusing parents from predominantly white neighborhoods in Boston are no longer following the politicians but actually leading themselves.

"I think John Kerrigan and Louise Day Hicks are only in the positions they're in because the people dictate," Pat Ranese said. "If they didn't follow the wishes of the people, they wouldn't be in."

"If they suddenly came out for busing or told the people to peacefully implement it, they'd lose their following."

Many antibusing parents like Theresa M. Kopps of Roslindale are no longer looking for the same things from Boston's politicians. "I think people look to the elected officials for encouragement and support, but as far as work goes people have taken the bit in their own teeth."

Mrs. Kopps, who works in the Tri-Neighborhood Information Center in West Roxbury, said many people don't speak up, but they are very well informed on the busing issue through a self education process. They no longer depend on politicians.

"I used to read myself to sleep with books, but now I read legislation," she said.

Many Boston politicians say these are trying times for men and women holding public office. Each has his own reasons for following a certain course of action regarding busing. Some are vocal and visible and others are saying nothing at all.

State Sen. Joseph F. Timilty, who represents Hyde Park, Mattapan and several suburban towns, says he spends time at schools in his district instead of making speeches. He has come under heavy fire from many antibusing foes for not continuing to take a strong stand against busing and implementation of the desegregation plan.

"I guess everybody makes up his own mind how to treat the issue. I was as vocal as everybody against the issue, but I would have thought the only responsible attitude to adopt now by the people in my walk of life is to make sure the children get to school and home safely," Timilty said.

The night following the stabbing of a white by a black youth at Hyde Park High School, about 1500 irate people packed the Hyde Park Municipal building to listen to speakers and decide what to do about the mounting crisis in the school. Timilty was booed by the angry audience.

"Yeah, I got booed because I did not ask them to go the low road. I asked them not to retaliate and some people out there were out for blood. They were mad at Sargent, Kennedy, White and no one showed up. I was the only game in town," Timilty said.



PIXIE PALLADINO

Another who did not fare well with the Hyde Park audience that night was Kathleen Sullivan of the Boston School Committee.

"I've made a lot of mistakes and one of them is the way I express myself," Miss Sullivan said. "It just comes out awkwardly but I do tell the people the truth as I see it."

Her experience that night was shattering, but there was one consolation.

Miss Sullivan recalls that as she was leaving the meeting a little girl in blue jeans held onto her arm while other people were talking at her and said "Miss Sullivan, I just want you to know that I felt sorry for you tonight and I wanted to thank you for saying what you did. I know how you must feel because I'm on the biracial committee and I've lost a lot of friends."

"There was something extraordinary about that experience," Miss Sullivan said, "Here was a child comforting an adult and when it happened I felt our school system was doing something right."

Miss Sullivan spends her time going from school to school with groups of parents inquiring into

"I think people look to the elected officials for encouragement and support, but as far as work goes people have taken the bit in their own teeth," says Tri-Neighborhood Information Center worker Theresa M. Kopps of Roslindale.

the needs of teachers, students and administrators. The rest of her time is consumed in trying to get these needs met — blacktops, clocks, window shades or extra money for a hockey team.

Also she is working on legislation she says will create a "fairer" solution to the Boston school question.

"I'm not doing anything glamorous or newsworthy, I'm just giving leadership where I'm most effective — in terms of school affairs, that's what I know best," she said.

School Committee chairman Kerrigan believes his leadership priority is fighting what he refers to as the "powers" of the city. His first target is The Boston Globe; he is planning an economic boycott of the newspaper's advertisers. Improvements in the schools come after that.

"I'm going full force on that (economic boycott). I think I've done a lot to destroy the credibility of The Globe. It pleases me to no end when The Globe has to put bulletproof shields up and when the TPF (Tactical Patrol Force) has to stand guard at The Globe and not at the Herald," Kerrigan said with contempt in his voice.

Kerrigan, who has come out for a busing plan which would include Boston suburbs, is very critical of decision makers and backers of the



FRAN JOHNENNE

Boston desegregation plan — many who are suburbanites.

"They're sacrificing a generation of Boston children for a social experiment that didn't work anywhere in the country. Those sacrificing the Boston children should have to sacrifice the financial price," he said.

Kerrigan finds many busing advocates hypocritical. "I suppose a good leader first of all should never ask his followers to do something he won't do himself," Kerrigan said.

Kerrigan believes that his leadership base is growing. "I think the young people are becoming aware of who is on their side."

"I attended the fight at the Garden (Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman on television). I don't know how many young people spoke to me — a lot of friendly hellos. Something I've noticed over the years is that younger people never seemed to bother with me as a politician. But now I think they know who is speaking for them," Kerrigan said.

Another School Committeeman, Paul Tierney, decided it was best to maintain a low profile in neighborhoods strongly affected by the Federal court order.

"I never went to South Boston High School purposefully. The School Committee excites emotions. I go to South Boston unannounced, without fanfare," Tierney said.

When violence erupted in South Boston, Tierney stuck to his position. "My presence, I felt, would not have a calming effect. If anything it might have the opposite effect," he said.

But Tierney's stand like that of many others who have taken what they deem responsible positions, is being questioned by many antibusing activists.

Fran Johnenne, who said of her political aspirations that she will "probably go on to something else eventually," questioned Tierney's loyalty to what she calls "the white caucus" (white anti-busing parents).

"A lot of elected officials have slowly stepped out. Paul Tierney is one of those. For a long time he marched with us, then he disappeared. In contrast Paul Ellison also on the Boston School Committee has been with us all the way," she said.

Many politicians who oppose forced busing have stopped speaking publicly on the issue. They recognize their limitations in fighting a Federal court order and say talk is just rhetoric and legal action is the next step.

"The fight now is in the courts or in Congress. There's little, if anything, the City Council, Mayor or School Committee can do now. So those are the avenues we have to pursue," said City Councilor Joseph Tierney, who drew up an ordinance requesting city lawyers to look into the possibility of appealing Garrity's decision.

"There are other things going on right now and I think they need attention. I've done what I could with busing, including keeping my kids out on the boycott," Tierney said.

But some politicians are still concentrating all their efforts on the fight against forced school busing.

Representative Raymond L. Flynn (D-South Boston) is spending 16 to 18 hours a day going to as many as four or five meetings, briefing himself on constitutional law and raising funds for alternative schools.

Flynn, who thinks visibility is important, still goes to the rallies and antibusing motorcades. But he said those events will not make the real difference.

"Motorcades and rallies don't particularly fascinate me. We have established the point that there's a lot of opposition to forced school busing in Boston," Flynn said. "The only place it's going to be won is in the courts and the halls of Congress. I'm trying to concentrate all my efforts on those two areas."

Bumper stickers reading "We want Flynn in '75" are not hard to find in neighborhoods like South Boston, parts of Dorchester and West Roxbury. Flynn says he hasn't yet decided if he will run for Mayor next year.

"One point I agree with is there should be one antibusing candidate for Mayor of Boston. But that decision lies with parents. My name has been the logical choice coming out of parent meetings on that," Flynn said.

Another politician rumored to be riding the busing issue into a mayoral candidacy is state Sen. William M. Bulger (D-South Boston). Bulger, who has been working for years to repeal the Racial Imbalance Law, is credited with drafting the statement of clarification released in October, at the height of the school crisis, by Hicks, Flaherty and himself.

Boston Mayor Kevin H. White may end up one of the fatalities of the Boston busing issue. Although he has maintained an open door policy to people on both sides of the issue and has been on record for at least two years contending that a long range solution to Boston school desegregation must include suburban participation, he nevertheless has alienated many antibusing parents.

Ann Farrell, a parent from Roslindale said, "I think some politicians are going to be hurt by this — Brooke, Kennedy and Mayor White."

A Hyde Park mother of three said, "I'll never give my vote to White again. He's for busing."

One politician who has never come under fire for deserting the cause is Councilor Hicks.

She feels visibility is important and she has been with antibusing parents at all the rallies, meetings, motorcades and marches. She also feels a leader should be able to give good speeches and have a charismatic personality.

When asked whether she thought of herself as the strongest antibusing leader, Mrs. Hicks said, "I think that's been proven."

One top city hall official said of her, "Mrs. Hicks would be mending clothes somewhere if it hadn't been for that issue."

She has often been called a bigot, but this doesn't bother her.

"I think if I'm a bigot there's a multitude of people who bear the same title all over the country, state and city. If you believe in neighborhood schools it doesn't mean you're a bigot. Even the head of CORE believes in neighborhood schools," she said.

Boston Police Comr. Robert J. DiGrazia, emotional and angry, is disappointed in the majority of the Boston leaders — black and white.

"I speak for myself and many in this department. We were very unhappy that we were put in the middle. We knew we would be, but not to the extent that the politicians and the pseudo-politicians placed us in. We had a job to do and we did it. They had a job to do and they didn't do it," the commissioner said.

"There is nothing more frustrating to see than grown people, fed by their so-called leaders, throwing rocks at school buses, raising their middle fingers and screaming ra-



LOUISE DAY HICKS



VIRGINIA SHEEHY



PAT RANESE

cial epithets at children young enough to be their grandchildren," DiGrazia said.

The role of a leader, and two current Boston leaders are both somewhat debatable these days.

Barbara Carroll, Hyde Park mother and president of the Chittick Home and School Association considers WIIDH talkmaster Avi Nelson a leader.

"The people in the community know what's going on and they look to people who tell it like it is. Avi Nelson tells it like it is — The Boston Globe doesn't. I think leaders listen to the majority of the people."

Councilor Lawrence DiCara says a leader is someone who does what he believes is right.

"I don't think people vote for marionettes or marshmallows. They don't vote for people who do what the most aggressive screamers or phone callers want. They vote for people who do what they think is right," said DiCara, who supports a metropolitan desegregation plan.

But Pat Ranese disagrees. "Leaders don't actually lead. They follow, if they're good leaders."

The definition of a leader is a variable this year in Boston. But the question most Boston politicians would like answered is how the busing issue will affect local politics and who will be Boston's next elected leaders.

State Rep. Barney Frank (D-Back Bay) whose Beacon Hill-Back Bay district is barely affected by the city's busing plan, says the relevant political question is whether or not there will be a "massacre of the moderates" next year just for telling people there is no Easter bunny.