Education: Racial Controversy Dogs U.S. Commissioner

The U.S. Office of Education (OE) was once a more or less obscure agency run by a succession of commissioners whose functions were no more upsetting to the status quo than those of the national archivist. The Commissioner of Education had little to fear from the politician campaigning with an eye for targets of opportunity. Few shots were fired his way. In the last few years, however, both the commissioner's responsibilities and his exposure to attack have vastly increased. The incumbent commissioner, Harold Howe, II, who took office early this year (*Science*, 31 December 1965), is being shot at daily. He is described by many of his critics in Congress and elsewhere as an individual feverishly intent on achieving racial integration in education, even if this requires the closing of neighborhood schools.

The commissioner now administers a variety of programs for the benefit of higher education and elementary and secondary education. Spending by OE exceeded $3 billion in fiscal 1966, and it will be increasing in the years ahead. Passage of the school-aid act last year and of the higher education legislation of 1963 and 1965 was itself enough to have made OE a major agency.

But besides having become a benefactor and bestower of gifts to the universities and local school districts, the commissioner has become a policeman. He was cast in this role, through no desire of his own, by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He must withhold federal money from the relatively few school districts in the 17 southern and border states (where racial segregation of school children formerly was required by law) which are refusing to get on with the painful task of desegregation.

Moreover, Howe believes strongly that in both North and South the racial segregation which is beyond the reach of the Civil Rights Act must be attacked voluntarily. He is convinced that if the children of the explosive Negro ghettoes of the big cities continue to remain in virtually all-Negro schools, the eventual result will be to "destroy this nation's spirit and vitality." Accordingly, Howe thinks it his duty to get out front and call for remedial action, however unsettling his proposals may be.

In a number of forthright speeches for which he is now being bitterly criticized, Howe has urged metropolitan areas to break up segregated school patterns by trying out such concepts as that of the "educational park," which might bring as many as 20,000 pupils together in one facility or complex, or by transporting slum children to suburban schools.

Addressing a school administrators' conference at Columbia University in June, Howe said that the integration problem poses the truest test of a school official's leadership. "A revolution is brewing under our feet, and it is largely up to the schools to determine whether the energies of that revolution can be converted into a new and vigorous source of American progress, or whether their explosion will rip this nation into two societies," he said.

School officials cannot wait until it is politically safe before pressing for integration, Howe added. "The load we must carry," he said, "is that of irritating a fair percentage of our white constituents—of embarrassing some governors and mayors, or alarming some newspaper publishers, and of enraging suburban taxpayers who in proportion to their means are not paying as much for their good schools as paupers in the cities are paying for their bad ones. . . . We must run the risk of being invited to resign. Unless all of us are willing to put our jobs and our integrity on the line, we should admit that American educators are no longer prepared to be the prime movers in American education."

Howe clearly has put his own job on the line. Nothing in his background seemed to have prepared him, when he took office, for the complexities of image-making on the national scene. A tall, tweedy, good-humored man of 48, Howe hides an energetic and restless spirit behind a calm demeanor. Before coming to OE he had had a varied career which included history-teaching at prestigious eastern private schools; principalships at three public high schools; the superintendency of the blue-stocking Scarsdale, New York, school system; and the job of director of the Learning Institute of North Carolina, an agency financed from sources such as OE and the Carnegie Corporation and dedicated to experimentation and reform.

Howe had never had to deal with a diverse and far-flung constituency, and he appears to have been largely sheltered from some of the harsher political realities. "He never had to get out and sell a school program to the rednecks" is the way one sympathetic observer put it. Howe admits that he did not foresee the interplay of events that was to occur. It was last May and June that he gave some of his most provocative speeches on the need to solve the problem of the ghetto schools. He did not guess that, to many, his words would later appear inflammatory in an atmosphere heated by the desegregation controversy, the wave of ghetto riots, the "black power" movement, and the exhortations of segregationist electoral candidates.

Nonetheless, Howe says that the speeches, which he feels might better have been given in a lower key, were necessary. His insistence that school integration for the ghetto children is critically important stems in part from conclusions reached by an OE-sponsored study entitled "Equality of Educational Opportunity."* This study, led by James Coleman, professor of social relations at Johns Hopkins University, was unprecedented in scope. Reaching to 4000 schools, it surveyed some 60,000 teachers and 645,000 pupils, at a cost of $1.5 million. The study attempted to find out what effects different schools, varying in the quality and makeup of teachers, pupils, and facilities, had on individual children.

A principal finding was the discovery that perhaps the most effective way to help "disadvantaged" children benefit from school is to put them with children of a higher socioeconomic group. "It means," Howe has said, "that if you put a small group of disadvantaged Negro children in a class with a large group of white children from middle-

* The full 737-page study may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, for $4.25. A 33-page summary is available for 30 cents.

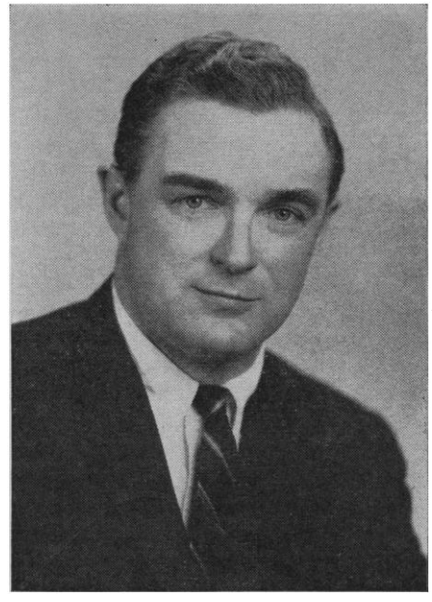
class homes, the Negro children will profit appreciably by that association almost without regard to the quality of the school."

Also, as Howe has noted, the survey findings indicate that the integration of children of different backgrounds can help the ghetto child without setting back the education of children of middle-class families. The commissioner, while not disputing the value of neighborhood schools generally, says that in the ghetto no real neighborhood exists.

President Johnson thus far has indicated that Howe has his support, and there is no likelihood whatever that so canny a politician as Johnson would dismiss a subordinate while he is under fire. The President conceded during a press conference last week that some of the men OE has sent into the field to oversee compliance with the Civil Rights Act have been overzealous and have made mistakes. But he said that the federal government must enforce the Civil Rights Act and lead in encouraging voluntary integration. Moreover, he said, the desegregation guidelines promulgated by OE to inform southern school districts of their responsibilities represent administration policy.

Nevertheless, Howe's position is not an easy one, and it may become more difficult still. Though by no means universally admired by educators, Howe has the confidence of important segments of the education community. And, in Congress, he has such influential supporters as Representative John E. Fogarty of Rhode Island, chairman of the appropriations subcommittee responsible for education, and Representative Carl D. Perkins of Kentucky, chairman of the general education subcommittee of the House Education and Labor Committee. On the other hand, Howe has become the target of criticism by many members of Congress from the South, and by an increasing number from the North.

Certain of the attacks on Howe have been virulent. Representative L. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, who is noted for intemperate outbursts, has said Howe "talks like a communist. That's why some of us who know him call him the Commissar of Education. The President should fire him." An Ohio Congressman, Wayne L. Hays, also noted for frequent and free-swinging charges against various objects of his displeasure, has said that Howe "is trying to destroy the school system in the United States as we know it."



Harold Howe

The desegregation guidelines have transformed the assault on school segregation in the South from a slow, district-by-district process of court suits to an administrative attack on the broadest possible front. The guidelines have stirred widespread unrest among parents of white pupils, and local and state politicians have been moved to new heights of outrage and denunciation.

Unfortunately for Howe, it is easier and more satisfying to despise a man than a set of guidelines. He is coming to personify for some southerners what they profess to see as a power-hungry, dictatorial federal bureaucracy. This seems true partly because Howe is, unavoidably, the policeman checking on compliance with the Civil Rights Act, and partly because he has attracted still further attention to himself by his speeches in the North calling for an end to de facto segregation. As somebody put it, Howe is replacing Senator (and former U.S. Attorney General) Robert F. Kennedy as the Dixiecrat's man to hate. Southerners in Congress, especially those uneasy about the November election, are not innocent of political motivation in their attacks on Howe, although the possibility that some of them are sincere should not be excluded.

Any statute as important and complex as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is likely to give rise to differences of interpretation. Some congressmen who were leading supporters of the act when it was before Congress now seem surprised and disturbed by what they have wrought. Representative William M. McCulloch of Ohio, the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, has said, for example, that the act was not meant to require the desegregation of school faculties. The administration, mindful of federal court rulings holding that faculty segregation constitutes racial discrimination against pupils, has interpreted the act otherwise.

Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, the Senate Majority Leader, recently defended an Appropriations Committee report (in which the hand of some southern senators was manifest) that denounced the desegregation guidelines as contrary to the intent of Congress. Mansfield said the Civil Rights Act was "designed to prevent an unlawful act of segregation—not to implement an affirmative policy of integration." Later, Mansfield withdrew his statement and said that, if anything, school desegregation was proceeding too slowly. However, neither his confusion over the meaning of the act nor McCulloch's expressed view that the guidelines go beyond the act's intent is helpful to Howe in his hour of trial.

As this was written, congressional unrest over the guidelines and over Howe's speeches had not led to any major legislative setbacks for the Johnson administration, although the attitude of many congressmen and senators toward OE was clearly watchful. Howe's standing with the President is likely to go steadily downward if he becomes so controversial a figure that important bills are endangered. On the other hand, the President is said to expect his Commissioner of Education to be more a man of ideas than a consummate politician.

Howe's tribulations arise as OE enters an activist phase of its development. Now that the agency has been given authority to aid education at all levels in important ways, it is eager to play a creative role and stimulate state and local educators to find better ways of doing things. Through the screening and approval of requests for cooperative research grants and of applications made under the new "supplementary education and services" program, OE can hope to influence innovation in the schools significantly.

Congress provided $75 million for supplementary centers and services in

fiscal 1966, and the prospect is that future appropriations for that purpose will mount steadily (OE's current request is for $145 million). Grants under this program can be used for educational parks and other innovations designed to bring about racial integration and improved methods of instruction (although it now appears that the legislation authorizing continuance of the program will state that, in reviewing proposals for approval, special consideration is not to be given the promotion of integration). It is in part because this well-financed program exists that school administrators are listening to Howe with more than just academic interest.

The evolution of OE from a weak, relatively unimportant agency to a strong one of the first rank occurred largely during the tenure of Howe's predecessor, Francis Keppel, the commissioner from late 1962 to early 1966. Keppel, who recently left HEW after a short stint as Assistant Secretary for Education and is now with General Learning Corporation, undoubtedly would not have escaped criticism had he remained commissioner.

Keppel was spared a violently angry reaction from the southerners principally because the desegregation guidelines which he issued last year were comparatively lenient. They drew heavy fire from civil rights spokesmen, especially Adam Clayton Powell, the Harlem congressman who chairs the House Education and Labor Committee. Keppel could not have avoided issuing more demanding guidelines this year. But some of Keppel's former associates believe he would not have made the controversial speeches Howe has made. They observe that Keppel was too sensitive politicially to have spoken out so. And, in their view, he was less inclined than Howe to feel that the commissioner should pioneer new ideas, although this observation would surprise Keppel.

Many people, conscious of the absence of any commonly observed standards in U.S. public education, look with favor on OE's new assertiveness and leadership. As a pioneer of ideas, Howe has by no means confined himself to the subject of racial integration. For example, he has told school teachers frankly that, as a group, they lack the exacting standards and other characteristics of a profession. He said that, in seeking professional standing, they should "grasp from administrators the responsibility for deciding which of their fellows shall be promoted and which shall not."

In urging that state departments of education be strengthened, Howe has told elected chief state school officers that, in the interest of protecting education from political intrusions, their posts should be held by appointive officials. Some who regard Howe as a courageous advocate of constructive, though often unsettling, ideas already are wondering whether a worthy successor can be found if Howe ever should be driven from office by unremitting criticism or presidential displeasure.

Many school administrators seem to agree that Howe's emphasis on the problem of the ghetto schools is not misplaced. They are thankful that he is trying to stimulate a serious public dialogue on the subject, although some have wished he would choose his words more carefully, and some feel that Howe would have the schools assume too much responsibility for social change. Forrest Conner, executive secretary of the American Association of School Administrators, told *Science*, "personally, and as the representative of AASA, I am pleased to say that we are very glad to have a man of Howe's caliber as Commissioner of Education."

A review of Howe's tribulations suggests a few tentative conclusions. Howe is a strong, unusually forthright man in a job which, as he has defined it, carries the heavy and incompatible responsibilities of serving as a counselor, on the one hand, and as a judge and policeman on the other. Giving the commissioner enforcement responsibilities under the Civil Rights Act appears to have been a mistake.

Howe says, no, the enforcement responsibility should rest with OE, the agency most familiar with practical school problems. Nevertheless, it does not seem impossible that a special agency, run by qualified people, could have been established within HEW but outside the Office of Education. The existing arrangement is contributing to a charged atmosphere in which efforts to attain one goal may contribute to the defeat of those made in the interest of another. "It's a little bit like turning over the discipline problems in a high school to the student counselor," John Letson, Atlanta's superintendent of schools and one of Howe's admirers, remarked to *Science*.

The leaders of the House Judiciary Committee have promised that a fair-minded inquiry on the administration of the desegregation guidelines will be undertaken after the November election. If this is done, the cloud of controversy surrounding Howe may lift somewhat, but the commissioner still will be faced with the task of reconciling the irreconcilable.

—LUTHER J. CARTER

U.S. China Policy: Conciliation or "Collision Course"?

The iceberg of U.S. policy toward Communist China has begun a slow melt during the past few months. Although the recent internal turmoil in China has made Washington more hesitant to consider a new policy than it was earlier this year, autumn finds officials still anticipating future U.S. gestures to Peking.

Perhaps the most surprising thing is not that a small thaw has been initiated in Washington but that it has taken so long to bring this about. Since 1950 there has been little but acrimony between the governments of the two countries.

The complex history of Chinese and American attitudes is responsible for much of the bitterness. For many decades Americans have regarded the Chinese as "friends," partly due to the activities of American missionaries in China, and have prided themselves on what they considered a benevolent "open door" policy toward a weak, though vast, nation. The identification