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The Bundy Report

> It is because modern education is so seldom inspired by a great hope that it so seldom achieves a great result. The wish to preserve the past rather than the hope of creating the future dominates the minds of those who control the teaching of the young.—BERTRAND RUSSELL

"It used to be," recalls a suburban school superintendent, "that when a New York City schoolman stood up at a session of a national educational meeting, the audience hushed in churchlike silence. Teachers or principals from other parts of the country hung on his every word. They listened in almost reverential awe, for here was a man from the very pinnacle, from the educational version of the City of God, and from the pedagogical avant-garde. He was not only a romantic figure, not only a 'star' celebrity, but also an object of deep respect. Whether the particular New York educator was in his own right worth all this, it was given him because of the system he represented. The sheer size of the New York schools had something to do with it but not everything, I think, and not even most. What set off New York like a precious jewel was its reputation for professional quality, in program and staff. Its programs were fabled for their daring and effectiveness, and the staff had a legendary collection of supermen and women. It was said to be so difficult to qualify as a

teacher in New York that Ph.D.'s were a dime a dozen, even in the elementary schools."

Whether the reputation was deserved is beside the present point. What matters is that it was believed, so that New York was the nation's educational pacemaker in a way that not even Evanston (Illinois) Township and Newton (Massachusetts) became after World War II. The "golden age" of public education in New York reigned in the 1920's and 1930's. By the 1950's and 1960's, the image may have changed to that of the Blackboard Jungle, but what happens in New York still sends tremors throughout the web of education across the nation. Educators everywhere still have an eye cocked on New York. For one thing, the 900-school system is responsible for the education of nearly one out of every forty public school pupils in the entire United States.

Thus, passions were ignited far beyond the borders of New York when, on November 9, 1967, a report entitled *Reconnection for Learning* was published. Better known as the Bundy Report, it dealt with the problems of the New York City school system and proposed that the *path* toward solution (*not* the solution itself) could best be opened up by decentralizing the system and admitting parents and the community into a partnership with professionals in educational decision-making.

Understanding the Bundy Report and the storm that followed is crucial, therefore, for at least two important reasons: first, because the concept and practice of citywide decentralization and strong community engagement in urban education developed first in New York; and second, because the New York schools are still, to an important degree, the cynosure of American public education.

The report was drawn up by a committee created in response to a request of the New York State Legislature. This committee, headed by McGeorge Bundy—president of the Ford Foundation, former Presidential Assistant and a former dean of faculty at Harvard—took as its basic premise the legislature's pointed assertion that "increased community awareness and participation in the

educational process is essential." This seemingly bland idea, well-grounded in the traditional American concept of local responsibility for free public education, became, in turn, the controversial theme of the Bundy Report.

In surveying New York City's vast school system, the committee found problems to be so severe and the breakdown of school-community ties so advanced that it called for fundamental structural changes in the administration of the schools. "If this proposal is radical," asserted *The New York Times* in response to the report, "it is justified by the fact that the situation is desperate. If the cure is drastic, it is necessary because a long succession of moderate reform efforts has failed to halt the deterioration of New York's gigantic school system."

The heart of the Bundy Report was a plan for massive decentralization that was expected to have far-reaching educational and social implications. Before attempting to describe the plan, however, or to interpret its implications, we must look briefly at the circumstances that gave rise to it.

A Deteriorating System

By the time of the report, the New York City school system had long since begun to sag under the weight of its own sprawling bureaucracy, with a corresponding drop in its ability to respond effectively even to normal demands, to say nothing of crises. Quite apart from the issues of parental control, racial conflict, and massive educational failure, the overcentralized, rigid system itself had become a commonplace target of analysis and criticism. Indeed, administrative decentralization of the New York school system had been urged for at least a quarter of a century. The first tangible step was taken in 1961, when a new citywide board of education was installed following the disclosure of scandals in the awarding of school-construction contracts. Existing but basically moribund local districts—each headed by its own board—were reorganized and reduced in number. The power to appoint district school board members was shifted from the anachronistic

borough presidents' offices to the central board of education. In turn, the central board was required to seek the advice of local screening panels chosen by the presidents of the parents' associations in the various districts.

All this looked fine on paper, but the plan had basic defects. First, the selection method involving the advice of parents' associations was less effective in low-income areas than in middle-class sections. (The "parents' association," as then and now constituted, is essentially a middle-class device and is not consonant with the style of low-income, poorly educated minority parents.) Second, these local school boards possessed only advisory powers, and their efforts to respond to community demands were often frustrated by the long chain of command leading to the central board headquarters.

Moreover, the central board itself was less than enthusiastic about the plan. As one of the present authors, Marilyn Gittell, wrote in her analysis of decision-making in the New York schools (*Participants and Participation*), "The Board of Education has been reluctant to delegate powers to local boards for fear that they would encroach on its own authority." Not until 1967 were these local boards even provided with office space, and they remained largely without professional or supporting services.

The failure of this partial decentralization to make the schools more responsive to parental and community needs did not pass unnoticed. Grievances focused not only on children who were failing in school, but also on thousands who left school before being graduated. The largest group were the dropouts—an estimated one-third of the high school population (for the 1967 graduating class, some 20,000). In ghetto schools, dropout rates were averaging 70 per cent. Besides dropouts, an estimated 12,000 students (in the 1966–67 academic year) were "pushouts"—suspended students—many of whom were left to their own devices after their suspension from school. These included students classified as mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed; but other students were suspended for disciplinary reasons—ranging from failure to

do homework to fighting with other children. According to a 1967 report by fourteen civic and civil rights groups, many students were suspended without receiving a fair hearing. Several years earlier, Mobilization for Youth had attempted to assure hearings and the right to legal representation for students threatened with suspension. Failing on the administrative level, MFY brought a case in the federal courts on behalf of a junior high school student. The district judge ruled on behalf of the plaintiff, finding that a pupil's suspension hearing in a district superintendent's office was a critical matter that could violate his First Amendment guarantees, and that, therefore, attorneys should be present. The judge enjoined the board of education from conducting suspension hearings without the student's lawyer being present, but the decision was appealed and, on December 7, 1967, it was reversed by the U.S. Court of Appeals. However, the principle was embodied in a new board of education bylaw early in 1970.

Many other indexes pointed to the need for fundamental change. Dissatisfaction with the schools and with discredited professional education officials was matched by growing distrust of the lay leadership provided by the board of education. Bitterness toward the board was fanned, over the past decade, by its successive rollbacks on promises of integration. For the board's part, its distance from ghetto communities grew. In the summer of 1967, for example, while the Bundy panel deliberated, the board declined to attend a hearing by the citywide antipoverty council on whether the board or ghetto communities themselves should have charge of some $69 million in federal funds intended for the improvement of schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Every one of dozens of Negro and Puerto Rican leaders who testified at the hearing—including parents and black school teachers—argued that they would rather see the city return the money to Washington than have it handed over to the board, which, they said, would use it against the interests of minority children. Reflecting decentralization sentiment already in the wind, some of

the speakers wanted the federal money spent on an alternative school system, run by local communities within the city.

By this time, too, the vaunted experimental projects and pilot innovations that the New York system seemed to adopt as quickly as the latest fall fashions, had lost their luster and credibility. They were, as David Rogers has written, "uncoordinated, overlapping, and often inadequately evaluated [and] virtually none that have been tried have worked." The discontents were magnified during the two-week teachers' strike at the beginning of the term in the fall of 1967, which convinced some parents that teachers and administrators held their group interests above those of the children.

Furthermore, parents, and especially ghetto parents, began to resist official explanations that placed the burden of failure on the child or his family. Rather, there was an increasing tendency to place responsibility on the schools. Parents accused the schools of being either unwilling or unable to respond to the special needs of ghetto children. They asserted that many teachers and administrators were hostile or negative toward children who did not conform to essentially middle-class styles and values. Expressions of dissatisfaction ranged from talk about a "lack of accountability" on the part of the school system to charges that New York City educators were "colonizers sent down among them by a central office."

The collision between tense community forces and the central board of education was not long in coming. The clash took the form of strikes, boycotts, and demonstrations. There were meetings and petitions, charges and countercharges, even an invasion of the board of education headquarters by a self-styled "People's Board of Education," headed by Milton Galamison, a well-known Negro minister and civil rights activist. In 1966, the "People's Board" brought suit in the courts to prevent adoption of the regular school budget, complaining that the city's regular school board had "yielded its policy-making authority to the school sys-

tem's professional staff." Less than two years later, the Reverend Galamison was appointed by Mayor Lindsay to the expanded central board of education.

A Plan for Real Reform

It was in this context that the New York State Legislature, in the spring of 1967, passed an education money bill to which a significant string was attached. The bill granted the New York City schools a bonus of $54 million in state aid if the monolithic school system could be split administratively into five school districts—one in each of the city's boroughs (which are weak political units that coincide with the five counties within the city borders). This five-borough approach had actually originated in the education section of the report of a group appointed by the previous (Wagner) administration, the Temporary Commission on City Finances. Mayor Lindsay adopted the decentralization idea and suggested it to the legislature as a formula to gain more state aid for the city.

At that time, decentralization was regarded purely as a paper reorganization. But there is reason to believe that the mayor had substantive reorganization in mind as well. Earlier, he had sought to make city government in general more responsive to community needs—for example, by proposing a civilian police-review board and by attempting to open a series of vest-pocket "city halls" in various parts of the city.

Later, more than a year after the Bundy Report had been published, he had the following to say about the play of forces in the city's schools:

> There just isn't any one group powerful enough to control New York. Because of the size of this city many of our institutions have become so huge that in their groping for even more power they tend to collide with each other. . . . The City's schools, for example, over the years . . . have been subjected to two powerful groups—the Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education, to whom the city turned over one billion dollars every year without a check or double check, and the United Federation of Teachers. These two groups became so totally engaged in their own contest that they bypassed everyone else. Look over their past contracts and you will see a pattern whereby the two groups often dovetailed. They were inextricable. It became very difficult when parents and children began to demand a place at table because the mountainous bureaucracy began to groan.

To the surprise of almost everyone, the legislature, aware, of course, of the controversy that had been raging in the city, adopted the mayor's proposal and carried it one step further. It attached the condition that the mayor present a plan for greater community participation in the governance of the city's schools. In effect, the legislature asked the city to develop a new plan for real—not paper—decentralization. The influence of State Commissioner of Education James E. Allen is said to have weighed heavily in the legislative opening toward decentralization, but, whatever the cause, the fact that the legislature bypassed the board of education and laid the challenge for a reform blueprint at the mayor's door presaged a storm even before the study began.

Amid cries charging political interference with the schools, Mayor Lindsay moved to meet the legislature's request by appointing a blue-ribbon advisory panel to produce such a plan. The panel members included: the president of the board of education (then Lloyd K. Garrison, subsequently Alfred Giardino); Mitchell Sviridoff, then head of the city's Human Resources Administration, a new superagency that sought to coordinate health, education, and welfare efforts throughout the city; Francis Keppel, president of General Learning Corporation and former U.S. Commissioner of Education; Dr. Bennetta Washington, a Negro former high school principal, head of the Women's Job Corps and wife of Mayor Walter Washington of Washington, D.C.; and Antonia Pantoja, a social work professor and prominent leader in the Puerto Rican community. To chair the panel, the mayor called upon McGeorge Bundy, as a previous mayor (Wagner) had appointed the previous president of the foundation (Henry T. Heald) to head an earlier major school inquiry (1961). A founda-

tion-staff member (and one of the present authors), Mario Fantini, was appointed staff director of the study.

The membership of the panel was determined by the mayor and four members of his inner circle—Deputy Mayor Robert W. Sweet, Chairman of the City Planning Commission, Donald H. Elliot, Mitchell Sviridoff, and Lewis Feldstein, an assistant to the mayor whose tasks included liaison with the board of education. The group considered but quickly dismissed any idea of doing the study within the city administration: staff time was not available and, more decisively, the study needed the aspect of detachment—the cachet of a group at some remove from the city government. The mayor himself proposed Bundy as someone of unexceptionable status whose recommendations would command a hearing in all communities.

The mayor's staff felt that the panel must include one black and one Puerto Rican. Antonia Pantoja was an almost automatic choice for the Puerto Rican community. Various men and women were considered as possible representatives of the black community. Kenneth Clark's name came up and was passed over, because of various differences between him and the Puerto Rican community. Bennetta Washington was decided upon because she could add the experience and perspective of a teacher and school principal and because of her special familiarity with the problems of school dropouts. Keppel was picked because of earlier experience as commissioner of education, his new role in the "education industry," and the fact that, five years earlier, he had served on a committee to select a new superintendent of the city's schools. Sviridoff was to be the mayor's representative on the panel. After some hesitation, it was decided that, since the legislature's mandate strongly implied changes in the board of education's powers, a representative from the board of education had to be involved; there was also the practical consideration that, in its work, the panel would need information and staff assistance from the Office of the Board of Education. Accordingly, the president of the board was asked to represent it on the panel.

In the months that followed its appointment, the panel and its staff solicited proposals for decentralization and met with hundreds of individuals and lay and professional groups. It examined the educational problems and studied the demographic, fiscal, legal, and political implications of various organizational configurations. It analyzed the functions of the school system—personnel, budgeting, curriculum, etc.—in terms of the forces having an impact on each function and of the effectiveness of each in meeting educational goals. It reviewed the effects of city government and the state department of education and state law on school policies and practices. As its proposals began to take shape, it discussed them with various interested parties—particularly civil rights groups, the United Federation of Teachers, and the Council of Supervisory Associations.

In the end, when the advisory panel issued its report, Mr. Giardino, who emphasized that he was serving not as an individual but as a representative of the board of education, expressed basic disagreement with its findings. Arguing that the board was already committed to parent and community participation and to decentralization, he declared that

> serious problems must arise in recasting, in one quick stroke, the largest educational system in the world. We must be reasonably sure that a plan will be successful and [we] do not feel sufficient assurance in the plan submitted. Rather than a rigidly timed and mandated set of procedures, we prefer a more deliberative process of movement and evaluation. Moreover, we believe there are constructive legislative alternatives that can achieve many of the same goals without as many dangers.

Mr. Giardino filed the panel's sole dissent.

The basic recommendations of the Bundy Panel can be summarized as follows:

1. The New York City public schools should be reorganized into a community school system, consisting of a federation of largely autonomous school districts and a central education agency.

2. From thirty to no more than sixty community school districts should be created, ranging in size from about 12,000 to 40,000 pupils—each district large enough to offer a full range of educational services yet small enough to maintain proximity to community needs and to promote diversity and administrative flexibility.

3. The community school districts should have authority for all regular elementary and secondary education within their boundaries and responsibility for adhering to state education standards.

4. A central education agency, together with a superintendent of schools and his staff, should have operating responsibility for special educational functions and citywide educational policies. It should also provide certain centralized services to the community school districts and other services, upon the districts' request.

5. The state commissioner of education and the city's central educational agency should retain their responsibilities for the maintenance of educational standards in all public schools in the city.

6. The community school districts should be governed by boards of education selected, in part, by parents and, in part, by the mayor from lists of candidates maintained by the central education agency. Membership on these boards should be open to both parents and nonparent residents of a district.

7. The central educational agency should consist of one of the following: (a) a commission of three full-time members appointed by the mayor or (b) a board of education with a majority of members nominated by the community school districts. In the latter, the mayor should select the members from a list submitted by an assembly of chairmen of community school boards; the others should be chosen by the mayor from nominations made by a screening panel.

8. Community school districts should receive an annual allocation of operating funds, determined by an objective and equitable formula, which they should be permitted to use with the widest possible discretion within set educational standards and union-contract obligations.

9. Community school districts should have broad personnel powers, including the right to hire a community superintendent on a contract basis.

10. All existing tenure rights of teachers and supervisory personnel should be preserved as the reorganized system goes into effect. Thereafter, tenure of new personnel employed in a particular district should be awarded by the district.

11. The process of qualification for appointment and promotion in the system should be revised to give community school districts freedom to hire teachers and other professional staff from the widest possible sources, so long as hiring is competitive and applicants meet state qualifications.

12. Community school boards should establish procedures and channels to facilitate the closest possible consultation, at the individual school level, with parents, community residents, teachers, and supervisory personnel.

13. The central education agency should have authority and responsibility for advancing racial integration by all practicable means. The state commissioner of education should have authority himself, or through delegation to the central education agency, to overrule measures that support segregation or other practices inimical to an open society.

14. The community school system should go into effect for the school year beginning September, 1969, assuming passage of the necessary legislation in the 1968 legislature.

15. The main responsibility for supervising the transition from the existing system to the community school system should rest with the state commissioner of education. The principal planning and operational functions should be assigned to a temporary commission on transition, which should work closely with the current board of education, the superintendent of schools, and his staff.

16. The transition period should include extensive programs of discussion and orientation on operations and responsibilities

under the community school system and on educational goals. Community school board members should be afforded opportunities for training and be provided with technical assistance on budgeting, curriculum, and other school functions.

These recommendations dealt with four main problems: the nature of community voice in educational policy, the composition and selection of community boards of education, relations between community boards and higher authorities, and reform of the personnel system. It may be helpful to examine the issues confronting the panel in each of these areas and to understand the reasoning that led to the panel's final recommendations.

Community Authority: Early in its deliberations, the panel concluded that, if it was to go beyond a mere paper reorganization, it had to propose that substantive power in the areas of finance, personnel, and curriculum be given to local governing units.

Since the community school districts were to be quasi-autonomous and would not have taxing powers, they would have to draw their funds from the overall city education budget. But autonomy without control of the purse would be an illusion. Thus, to guarantee that community school districts would have flexibility in the way they spent their funds, the panel proposed that they receive lump-sum allocations from the board of education. This would eliminate line-item restrictions, so that the community boards could determine their own priorities. Only through lump-sum allocation would community school boards have effective power to make their own decisions on pupil-teacher ratios, the functions of personnel, the number and kinds of books and other instructional materials, the conduct of experimental programs, and a host of other needs and educational strategies.

To ensure that districts with special needs would receive their fair share, the panel proposed that these lump sums be allocated by a formula that would go beyond per-capita allotment and take into account such factors as income levels, unemployment

rates, and the presence, in particular districts, of either non–English-speaking children or gifted children. To ensure against misuse of funds, the panel outlined a number of auditing and reporting procedures and other safeguards.

Local-Board Composition: The choices open to the panel in the difficult decisions regarding composition of community boards included communitywide representation, parent-only representation, and arrangements that would include professionals. The panel decided on a parent-based system, which, it felt, would be most responsive to the needs and interests of children attending the public schools. Unwritten in the report, but clearly implied, was the converse of this proposition—that is, that "nonparents," including parents of private and parochial school pupils, would have no voice in the direct operation of the community public schools. (Throughout the country, where local boards are elected, voting by nonparents has often proved a problem on such issues as taxation for school expenditures.)

Indirectly, through their political participation in mayoralty elections, nonparents could have some influence, but it would be quite weak compared to the day-by-day active participation available to parents. That nonparents would not be entitled to vote in community elections was not considered constitutionally objectionable because the community districts had no taxing powers.

Seeking to encourage maximum parent participation in the selection process, the panel recommended that a prescribed proportion of eligible parents—"at a level sufficiently substantial to constitute an effective participatory process"—be established, below which elections would not be valid. In such cases, it proposed that a new election or alternative methods of obtaining parental representation should be employed. (The legislation passed in 1969 carried no such provisions, and, as it turns out, only 15 per cent of the eligible voters participated in the initial elections, in March, 1970.)

The panel proposed a two-stage process for selection of the parent members: Representatives of individual schools would be chosen by an assembly of parents; these representatives, in turn, would select the board members on a basis proportionate to the pupil population of each school.

In fixing on a parent-only majority, the panel sought to avoid the danger that these local boards might be dominated by political clubs, by majorities of residents who were not parents, or by sectarian groups that might not hold the interest of public education uppermost. (The 1969 decentralization law did not limit voting to parents, and in the first elections, fears that such organized interests as sectarian groups, the UFT, and political parties would prevail were borne out in many districts.)

The panel leavened its recommendations favoring parents, however, with a provision that five of the eleven community board members be appointed by the mayor. This provision reflected a concern for minorities within districts marked by a strong racial or ethnic character—particularly Puerto Ricans in largely Negro neighborhoods. Thus, the report declared,

> It is a real possibility, especially in the early years of the reorganized school system, that a parentally chosen district panel might wholly exclude representatives of minority groups in that district. While we do not hold with proportional representation on Community School Boards, we do believe that total exclusion of minority representation would violate the spirit of community participation in the educational process.

Recognizing that its proposal trod on new ground in urban school structure, the panel provided for review of the selection method by the state commissioner of education after a three-year period; at that time, an alternative type of board selection or composition could be adopted by a local district through a referendum vote.

The panel decided on the mayor as the agent for choosing the centrally selected members because of his citywide purview and

his prior responsibility for the city's schools, notably in the allocation of the school budget from the total municipal budget. Another consideration was to help insure a broadly based representation. Recognizing that this decision would unleash charges of political domination (such charges did develop), the panel nonetheless argued that there were now strong reasons for breaking down the supposed wall between a city's highest political office and its public school system. Nationwide recognition of the urban crisis and its educational component was growing, and traditional strictures maintaining a separation between political and educational authority were weakening.

Both by admitting parents to a more active role in the educational process and by building a closer link to elected government, the panel sought responsibility and accountability—a school system so organized as to be more responsive to the needs of the citizens. The panel also hoped that, through closer ties with city government, the schools would be able to coordinate their programs with other city agencies, such as its sixty existing planning districts and its recreation, health, and antipoverty efforts.

Size and Number of Districts: The establishment of boundaries for the proposed new districts was a politically sensitive matter for which the panel would have had no appetite, even if time and resources had permitted. But the panel urged flexibility in these matters, taking into account the complexity of the city and the likelihood that changes would, in the future, be desired. It suggested the creation of an additional ten to twenty districts beyond the existing thirty (none of which would have to be of uniform size), and a process allowing for the changing of boundaries three years after the establishment of the initial districts.

The creation of additional districts would have helped to insure more representation of minority groups. Under the legislation finally passed in 1969 and amended in 1970, the existing number of thirty districts was retained. This partially accounted

for, in the initial elections under the law, the lack of minority representation on the boards of several districts with large minority populations.

Relations to Higher Authorities: While tipping the balance toward far greater responsiveness to diverse community needs, the panel took pains not to destroy the citywide integrity of the school system. The reorganized school system, it said,

> should insure all pupils and all localities the benefits of the numerous and variegated facilities and services that major urban school systems can offer—ranging from special high schools to costly research, technical services, and logistic support. It should couple the advantages of urban bigness with the intimacy, flexibility and accessibility associated with innovative suburban school systems.

Without diluting the essential independence and decision-making of the community boards, therefore, the panel proposed that the community boards have a number of ties with the central education agency (the board of education). These ties would include the latter's authority over pupil transfers (to ensure optimum utilization of school buildings throughout the city), over negotiations of the union contract, and—of crucial importance—over integration policy.

Anticipating charges that a federated school system might lead to sectarian pockets—black power districts, on the one hand, or ultraconservative or segregationist districts on the other—the panel proposed that the central agency be empowered to overrule any actions by a community school board "that are judged to be inimical to a free and open society." But the panel said this power ought to follow guidelines established by the state commissioner of education. It further cautioned that the central power to curb parochialism or sectarianism should not be interpreted to exclude a reasonable curricular emphasis upon the cultural background of groups that were a large element in a given school—an obvious reference to frequent demands in the ghettos for attention to

Negro history and Hispanic and Afro-American studies in the schools.

In view of the city's diversity, the panel provided for the possibility that some districts might wish to continue to draw on many of central headquarters' traditional functions. Under the plan, therefore, a district would have the options of handling its own purchasing, curriculum development, and recruiting, or of relying on the central board of education for these services. Only such clearly citywide functions as pupil transfers, capital budgeting, integration policy, testing, auditing, and information were reserved exclusively to the board of education. The community school districts would be given freedom to contract with other agencies—universities, private research and development organizations, and other governmental agencies.

In disputes between community school boards and the central board of education, referee responsibility would lie with the state commissioner of education. Implicit in the panel's view was a trust in community responsibility, so the burden of proving irresponsibility or improper activity would lie with the central board.

Personnel: The main direct personnel power granted to the community boards would be the right to hire, on contract, a community superintendent of schools. While preserving tenure and centralized collective bargaining, the panel also proposed to place hiring and the granting of tenure at the community level. Its single most important—and controversial—personnel recommendation called for elimination of the central citywide examination system and its venerable board of examiners, established in 1898.

This recommendation was intended to ensure a wider pool for recruitment of personnel and a more flexible promotion system. In New York State, only two school systems, New York City's and Buffalo's, required examinations for teacher certification beyond the state standards. Not only would centralized examinations be

inconsistent with the requirements of effective decentralization, the panel claimed, but the system had grown obsolete in a market where the demand for qualified teachers outran the supply. The examination system had also produced an inbred leadership structure that discouraged flexibility and change. The panel called, instead, for "a broadening of the concept of merit and qualification for educational leadership, opening the system to more talents and ability, both from within and without the system." It cited studies that indicated that formal course work, age, length of service in a school system, and prior school-administrative experience—factors given heavy weight under the present system of promotional examinations—bear no positive relationship to the ability of a principal to improve the quality of staff performance. Coincidentally perhaps, a few months later, the board of education announced that, for the first time, one of the national teacher examinations (in junior high mathematics) would be used instead of a city test. It also reduced, by two years, the time required before a teacher could have access to the supervisory career ladder.

The personnel reforms raised the question of adequate staffing. In a system in which each community school district had to compete with the others for staff, would teachers flee the ghettos for middle-class districts? The existing system, whatever its defects, at least guaranteed, by means of an assignment system, an adequate number of teachers in the most "difficult" schools. A UFT statement declared: "[The Bundy proposal] ignores the new power and integrity of the professional teacher who will not continue to teach in any school or district where professional decisions are made by laymen." Nevertheless, for several reasons, the panel was confident that predominantly ghetto districts could attract and hold adequate numbers of qualified teachers. It held that:

1. Removal of rigid entrance requirements would facilitate the entry of additional talented teachers from the city, the metropolitan area, and the nation generally.

2. Despite its problems, the New York City school system's salaries are, competitively, quite favorable, and low-income districts could offer the same salaries as more economically favored districts.
3. The air of reform and innovation under the reorganized system would attract large numbers of men and women ready to accept difficult professional challenges.

Although predominantly Negro and Puerto Rican districts might, at first, seek to staff their schools with more black and Puerto Rican teachers and administrators, the panel—again committed to the proposition that most parents want quality education rather than the exercise of power for power's sake—anticipated that professional quality would sooner or later override ethnic considerations in the selection and promotion of teachers. According to the panel, the best guarantee that the selection of staff would eventually be based on merit rather than race would lie in the improved school and community climate that would grow out of strengthened cooperation between parents and school personnel. Teachers would serve in a given district because they chose to be there and were chosen by the community, rather than having been assigned there without an expression of preference on either their part or the community's.

Opposition to the Plan

The panel took great pains to ensure that the report's language was conciliatory. (It described the failings of the New York schools "politely and precisely," according to the *Saturday Review*.) Despite its tone, however, the hard bite of its proposals made fierce opposition, particularly by those with a vested interest in the *status quo*, inevitable.

Revelations, exposés, and reform plans were part of the way of life of the board of education and the New York schools' administrative bureaucracy. As early as 1933, the panel's report noted, studies had been made that called for increased diffusion of ad-

ministrative and pedagogical responsibilities to superintendents, principals, and teachers. Just before World War II, François S. Cillie—in a Teachers College report, *Centralization or Decentralization? A Study in Educational Adaptation*—called for decentralization, arguing that instruction could be individualized better, change adopted more readily, and programs administered more effectively under a decentralized system. In 1942, Alvin Hicks, in *A Plan to Accelerate the Process of Adaptation in a New York City School Community*, said that the potential for community participation was being ignored because of the unwieldiness and size of the big-city systems, such as New York's. Dozens of other studies and reports—major and minor, official and private (to say nothing of best-sellers like *The Blackboard Jungle, Up the Down Staircase,* and *36 Children*)—that embarrassed but failed to change the New York school system dealt not only with the centralized organization of the system but also with management, pupil achievement, personnel policies, and, of course, racial integration. So constant had been the attack that school officials "tend to be inordinately suspicious of any outsiders [and the system] has taken on an almost 'paranoid' tone in recent years," as David Rogers noted.

And, yet, the system had not changed much, not only because of the failure of diverse factions in the city to coalesce vigorously or persistently enough to carry through on reform blueprints, but also because of the acquired skill and almost unlimited capacity of the system for resisting protest and change. By "confusing and dividing the opposition, 'seeming' to appear responsive to legitimate protest by issuing sophisticated and progressive policy statements that are poorly implemented, if at all, and then pointing to all its paper 'accomplishments' over the years as evidence both of good faith and effective performance," to use Rogers' metaphor, the system has, like a punching bag, always managed to return to its old equilibrium, regardless of the force or direction of the punches aimed at it.

But the system's antennae sensed in the Bundy Report a challenge of extraordinary, perhaps unprecedented, force. First, as noted, conditions in the schools, particularly in ghetto schools, had deteriorated so gravely that they could no longer be hidden from wide public notice. Also, in contrast to earlier plans for decentralization, the panel's proposals were unique in their urgency and aggressiveness. Not only had the panel been legitimized in its origin under a legislative act, but also its report buttressed its recommendations with specific proposed legislation, ready for enactment. The report suggested in other ways a strong belief on the part of the authors that it was an exercise in reality, not, like most reformist documents, one of noble intent but essential futility. For example, the panel included a timetable that foresaw full implementation by September, 1969. The report's very contents, therefore, bespoke a conviction of speedy enactment. Indeed, the implied optimism may have been stronger than the panel's actual belief in imminent approval, but it, nonetheless, galvanized the opponents into a degree of opposition that a plan of vaguer origin and content might not have done.

The mayor's support was clear:

> This response is more than an experiment in political democracy, although it clearly does make institutions more responsive to the citizenry. It also gives promise of ending the image of the schools as separate from a child or a parent's neighborhood. There is hope for our schools—all of them, in all parts of the city—only if they can rebuild their links to the neighborhoods of New York. And that cannot be done by promises or good intentions.

Approval of the recommendations was expected at the state level, too, since the state department of education, even while the Bundy Panel was still at work, had appointed its own group to consult on and evaluate its proposals.

The intrinsic audacity of the plan overcame the careful qualifications with which the panel sought to surround it. McGeorge Bundy had written, "These proposals will not bring instant educational improvement to New York," and "Decentralization is not attractive to us merely as an end in itself; if we believed that

a tightly centralized school system could work well in New York today, we would favor it." But the conciliatory pragmatism of the report's plea for a constructive orchestration of powers—the "reconnection"—could not overcome the fact that its proposals would diminish the powers of those previously in command and strengthen those of the weak.

Finally, although it did not purport to contain much new or original data, the report played a strong spotlight on the failure of other measures—including the great struggle for integration in the city—to arrest the spiral of educational decline. Given a mandate, the panel cut through the enormous complexities that had previously restricted no less brave men and women to piecemeal proposals for reform. It emerged with a proposal as political and social as it was educational. The proposal called for a totally restructured system *within which* particular educational changes could take root, thereby reversing previous reform approaches, which sought to rebuild the system block by block through particular education innovations. Thus, one observer, Jason Epstein, wrote in *The New York Review of Books:*

> Not only had it been a matter for them [the panel members] of forestalling a revolution in the ghetto but of simultaneously proposing solutions to pedagogical problems which have so far perplexed nearly everyone who has tried to think about them. To have had to face these dilemmas within the sharply foreshortened perspective of America's racial agony compounds the puzzle, so that one is amazed to consider that Mr. Bundy and his colleagues agreed to undertake their work at all. That they had also to state their conclusions in the form of legislative proposals elevates their task to a truly metaphysical level of difficulty, made still worse by the gloomy presence of an educational bureaucracy which all the forces of history, concentrated as they are on the ghettos of New York, have been powerless to budge.

Reaction to the panel's report was instantaneous. The existing board of education, represented on the panel by its president, Mr. Giardino, made its opposition felt through his official dissent. Others, too, read in the report an attack on their positions, and

elements in the school system that had often contended with each other quickly began to make common cause against the plan. The leadership of the UFT, for example, joined with the board of education and the CSA to oppose the Bundy proposals.* The drive against the proposal was initially spearheaded by the CSA, some of whose constituent bodies assessed their members to raise war chests against the plan. These school supervisors, sometimes described as the mandarins of the system, had risen to their position through what had originated as a merit system but had hardened into a protective guild, called by one critic, "a pyramid . . . so firmly impacted at its base and so remote at its summit that it promises to survive (unless it is destroyed by its angry clientele) longer than the pyramids of Egypt."

One basis of the fierce opposition among the lower supervisory ranks—men and women who had served their time and were on the way up—was the fear that they might lose their place in line for such jobs as principal or assistant superintendent. Another form of insecurity lay not so much in the prospect of loss of jobs (since the Bundy Plan proposed to protect tenured administrators' *ranks*) but in the possibility of disruption or discomfiture, since there was no guarantee of personnel remaining in their present *assignments*. The board of examiners itself called the plan "terrifying in its implication" for white teachers.† There were a small number of significant cracks in the massive opposition of the city's school administrators. One of the highest rank-

* An organization of eighty Negro school supervisors, however, endorsed the plan.

† In the attack of professional educators on the Bundy Report, there are remarkable echoes of the assault of thirty-one grammar school masters of Boston in 1844 on the seventh annual Report of Horace Mann as secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education. The issues were different, but the battle was drawn along the lines of threatened reform and innovation over established practice. Mann's report was labeled a "pernicious tract." He was accused of being insufficiently acquainted with the Boston schools, and it was said that he had "so far poisoned [the public mind] that great distrust is felt in all teachers of the old school." The injury the school masters perceived, as Michael Katz has observed, stemmed in part from their feelings that they were "career . . . teachers; they were proud of their work and felt that they were the representatives of an honorable educational tradition within the city."

ing school-headquarters officials wrote to the panel within twenty-four hours of publication of the report: "The recommendations are educationally sound and responsive to the political and social realities of the cities. Indeed, I think that this document will serve as a blueprint for change across the country. . . . some of my colleagues were both unkind and unfair; but you must remember that this report hits our ego, our image, and our future."

Another leading official, Deputy Superintendent of Schools Dr. Fred Hill, writing jointly with Dr. Richard L. Featherstone, chairman of the Department of Administration and Higher Education of Michigan State University, while calling the report weak in a number of respects, said it "is strongest in its inherent belief in the democratic procedure whereby citizens have a voice in the control of the destiny of their children through community educational systems." They concurred in the report's rejection of the concept that uniformity, in itself, provides equality: "It is perfectly evident that a city the size of New York with its varied population and myriad of educational needs, simply should not provide a uniform educational program throughout the city." Its weak points, they said, were its exclusion of teachers and other educators from the community boards, and its failure both to consider the mobility of families within the city and to seek from other governmental agencies and from private enterprise suggestions for models of schooling that would not be tied to geographical boundaries. (In fact, the Bundy Report did propose that district boundaries "should be so drawn as to encourage and facilitate greater coordination with other important governmental efforts serving human needs in the city," and spoke further of geographically unbounded models as options under a federated, decentralized system.)

Opponents of the panel's plan blanketed the city with speakers, brochures, and advertisements. They established a "hot line" telephone number, which anyone in doubt could call to find out "facts" about the controversy. The plan would have been a jolt, no matter whose hands had fashioned it. It rankled some opponents all the more because it appeared to be the work of "outsiders." This irritation was not confined to the educational bureaucracy, whose opposition to the proposals was predictable. It was shared, ironically, by some outside the system who had themselves worked long and hard to persuade, nudge, or force the giant system into revitalization. These included sociologists, political scientists, parent groups, educational specialists, and others who had, during their more than ten years of efforts to desegregate the city's public schools, achieved a kind of *esprit de corps*. The general defeat of these efforts had made the limited integration victories in certain areas where ghettos adjoined middle- and lower-middle-class neighborhoods all the more precious. Thus, many of the embattled integrationists were not so much opposed to the Bundy Panel *per se* as saddened, or angered, by its frank acknowledgement that decentralization would do nothing immediately to advance integration and its candid, methodical recital of the general failure of desegregation efforts —a defeat many could not bring themselves to admit.

All these groups, with some justice, regarded New York City's educational problems as their turf, and there was ample justification for their feeling that the Bundy Plan was the work of men and women essentially new to the educational wars of the city. If John Lindsay was not a "true New Yorker," in the sense of a battle-tested Democratic officeholder, the panel chairman, McGeorge Bundy, was even less so—he had arrived in the city only a year before. Yet, as president of the Ford Foundation and former dean of the Harvard faculty, he possessed great prestige. Also, he had, in a short time, stepped up the foundation's engagement in civil rights and social problems. But, to some liberals, his concern for and actions to meet the nation's social crisis were offset by his association with the Johnson Administration (which he had left but not renounced), more precisely, by his close association with the early official Vietnam policy.

Those who sought to stigmatize the panel as a group of outsiders would not have their minds changed by the fact that

the panel had access to advice and consultation from many of the leaders active in New York's educational struggles. Some of the latter (including Marilyn Gittell) were formal consultants to the staff. Others freely expressed themselves to panel members and/or staff: for instance, Kenneth Clark, Florence Flast of the United Parents Association, and such militant blacks and whites as Ellen Lurie, former head of EQUAL, a mainly white pro-integration group; David Spencer, a key figure in the I.S. 201 experimental school complex; and Roy Innis, head of Harlem CORE and later director of national CORE. So did all levels of the educational structure, from the superintendent of schools and members of the board of examiners to UFT President Albert Shanker, as well as members of the existing appointed local school boards. But none of this stilled the voices that cried foul because the panel itself consisted primarily of non–New Yorkers.

The *ad hominem* argument was employed as a tactical weapon of active opponents and as a parenthetical observation by purportedly objective critics of the community-participation movement generally. As a means of arguing against the substance of the plan, it was obviously irrelevant. But it is relevant in pondering the outcome of the panel's deliberations. Would a panel composed primarily of "true" New Yorkers have reached the same conclusions? In fact, could such a panel have been assembled without creating a conflicting tangle of the many and varied interest groups in the city?

Answers cannot, of course, be given with certainty. As bold as they were, the panel's particular proposals were not bizarre or esoteric. The general notion of decentralization of the New York City schools had been a subject of dialogues and reports for more than twenty-five years. Proposals to combine strong parental participation with meaningful administrative decentralization were already in the wind in various parts of New York, and, as noted, had been presented in an earlier form in the report of former Mayor Wagner's Temporary Commission on City Finances. The choice of a "non–New Yorker" panel entailed a political disadvantage, but it may well have been the lesser of other burdens. For example, if the mayor had selected an equally small number of "true New Yorkers," he might have had to omit important segments of the population and interest groups—for example, the teachers' union, militant elements of the Negro community, and the United Parents Association. Had he attempted to represent *all* major groups and interests, he would have emerged with a panel of a dozen or more members that might have been unwieldy and, more seriously, contentious. Whether taken consciously or unwittingly, the choice of a mainly "non–New Yorker" panel augured well for strong, unequivocal recommendations and may even, on balance, prove to have been wise politically.

In the immediate aftermath of the report's publication, many arguments were raised against it. The chief lines of attack were as follows:

1. *The scheme would Balkanize the city.* The creation of two dozen or more quasi-autonomous districts would penalize children who moved from one neighborhood to another, because curriculums would not be comparable. The system would result in duplication and inefficiency, consuming funds that might better be used for direct improvement of education (for example, smaller classes and more remedial services). Moreover, the panel had been naïve—if not deceptive—in drawing an analogy between the proposed districts and suburban or small-city school districts.

Against these arguments, proponents of the panel's plan noted that each district would be required to adhere to state educational standards and that a pupil moving from a district in Manhattan to a district in the Bronx would incur no more of a penalty than a pupil moving from Buffalo to White Plains. Moreover, the cost of duplication was exaggerated. (The city budget director subsequently estimated it would cost $13 million, or about 2 per cent of the total city education budget.) Besides, backers of the plan argued, the present centralized structure had already far exceeded the size at which it might benefit from economies of

scale. Instead, it had turned into a wasteful, educationally unsound bureaucracy.

As to the charge that it improperly compared the community school district to suburban or small-town districts, advocates of the plan noted that the report made no effort to glorify small districts; it simply pointed out that the proposed new districts, which might range from 12,000 to 40,000 in enrollment, would be sufficiently *large* to be able to offer the same range of services and curriculums as such cities as Berkeley, Norwalk, or Evansville.

2. *By creating segregated districts, the plan would deal a blow to integration efforts.* During its study, the panel frequently heard this fear expressed, mainly by whites. The panel report, while supporting the desirability of racial integration in the schools, took the position that, in New York City, integration had become a secondary issue. Ten years of efforts to reduce racial imbalance under the prevailing system of New York City school organization had failed because of white resistance, professional inaction, and population shifts. The panel's recommendation preserved the right of the central board of education to mandate integration policies and urged that the state offer individual districts incentives to promote integration. But it said that the long-run value of its proposals for integration must be found in their effect on the quality of public education: "Communities which achieve high levels of pupil performance—in schools that have a favorable climate for learning—will be the strongest possible magnet to draw all kinds of parents back to the city. And nothing less will do the job."

3. *The proposals would produce chaos and turn the schools over to "vigilantes" and "racists."* The UFT's Albert Shanker said he feared the plan might open the way for "local vigilantes to constantly harass teachers." Walter Degnan, then the head of the CSA, said, "Schools have been the focus of recent attack because they are the most vulnerable politically and because they involve, next to welfare, the largest sums of public monies."

Columnist Joseph Alsop charged that the decentralization movement was an effort "by the extreme wing of the Black Power movement . . . to take over control of the predominantly Negro schools in a whole series of big cities." Others voiced similar views in more guarded language.

Such fears cannot be discounted simply as tactical arguments. Over 90 per cent of the teachers were white, most of them Jewish, while the student body was half nonwhite (29 per cent Negro and 21 per cent Puerto Rican). In reply, however, advocates of the plan pointed out that the panel had written a number of strong safeguards into its plan—particularly the requirement that the community school districts, no more nor less than independent school districts, would be subject to the state education law and the considerable administrative powers of the commissioner of education. Other checks were provided in the reporting and auditing requirements. The community school boards would not, as the plan's opponents implied, be rump bodies but duly elected and selected official bodies. Those who would be "taking over" would not be outsiders or political extremists but the parents of the school children—those with the greatest stake in the educational effectiveness of the system. Moreover, the panel proposed a timetable and transition mechanism during which detailed plans for an orderly changeover would be made. The subsequent upheaval over personnel transfers in the Ocean Hill–Brownsville district, whose fate, many said, would become the entire city's should the panel's proposals be enacted, actually occurred, largely, because detailed guidelines and regulations did not exist and because the prospects for an orderly, planned transition had been killed in the legislature.

4. *Ghetto parents (if not laymen generally) are incompetent to deal with educational issues.* Lawyer and civil libertarian Morris Ernst, for example, declared that "Few of us are capable in time and background of being intellectually involved . . . We could easily wreck the lives of thousands of our children by giving power to parents who would be called upon to act without . . .

highly sophisticated . . . knowledge [about] the great and everlasting problem—the relation of the mind of a teacher to the mind of a pupil."

Proponents of decentralization replied by pointing to the tradition of lay control of public education. They argued that, while members of school boards have the role of reflecting community concerns and needs and of approving educational policy, they are neither required to be versed in the professional aspects of education nor are they supposed to oversee the day-to-day operations of the schools. Even Deputy Superintendent of Schools Hill, who expressed reservations about the report, acknowledged: "Basic are the twin assumptions that local people should have the right to make mistakes, and that, in the long run, they will ultimately evolve educational programs which best serve the needs of their children."

The reaction to statements about ghetto incompetence was expressed by a black caucus from five cities, at a Harvard education conference early the following year: "We consider it an insult to be asked to prove whether we can do a better job in order to be granted the necessary resources and support. We should not be forced into answering the question, 'Can you do it better?' to those who have failed miserably in the past despite their control over substantial resources."

Moreover, one of the least discussed and most innovative aspects of the Bundy panel's plan was its recommendation that prospective board members be given preparatory training. Few local school boards anywhere in the country even now provide such training to prepare incoming members for their responsibilities. The panel furthermore recommended systematic, intensive programs of education for the community at large on the powers and responsibilities of parents and boards in the proposed new structure.

5. *The personnel changes would deprive ghetto schools of adequate staffs and would destroy the merit system.* As noted earlier, the panel advanced several reasons for its belief that

schools would be adequately staffed and, indeed, that staff-community relations would improve. With regard to merit, defenders of the plan noted that teachers still would be required to meet state certification standards and that the present examination systems had produced an administrative structure in which initiative and innovation were not rewarded. Other protections against the spoils system included the requirement that openings be made public and that appointments and promotions be competitive—that is, that candidates be examined (by interview or test or both) and a record be maintained of the criteria by which they were employed or rejected.

The plan specifically recommended that tenure be preserved and that administrative personnel should retain salary and rank. It also recommended that, at the time the plan went into effect, no tenured person should be transferred out of a district without his consent. Despite these safeguards, opponents raised the specter of mass transfers out of newly decentralized districts into what they described as "the Livingston Street Hilton," or "[Board of Education] headquarters hotel."

Actually, the report was only the latest in a stream of studies indicating that the examination system is an outmoded device that rewards characteristics other than educational or administrative merit. As a New York University study, *Teacher Mobility*, noted in 1963, the present system pays off

> those with "stick-to-it-iveness," [those who] plug along, voraciously swallowing every exam that comes along, and become administrators; those who "know the system" and "speak the language" become administrators; the remainder, good and bad, with little success in either passing exams or knowing the system, are denied advancement and fall by the wayside. The school system feeds on its own kind, and many potentially good administrators are lost as a result.

That community control spells ethnic favoritism in hiring is not borne out by the limited experience to date in New York City. Even in the most embattled of New York's three experimental districts, Ocean Hill–Brownsville, the majority of new

teachers hired have been white. And in a 1968 survey of the three districts, a vast majority of parents (82 per cent) said it made no difference one way or the other, whether their children were taught mostly by black or by white teachers. Even in Ocean Hill–Brownsville, only one-fifth of the parents said they preferred black teachers.

6. *Decentralization would weaken the teachers' union.* Despite the plan's proposal that labor negotiations remain centralized, union leaders argued that the "breakup" of the system would make it more difficult to bargain forcefully. In New York, the UFT increasingly has gone beyond salary issues into demands for a voice in the determination of working conditions and educational policy. Some union officials believed that this trend would be blunted by the transfer of substantive decision-making powers to dozens of community boards. At the time the Bundy Report appeared, the union's self-confidence was at an all-time high as a result of its success, a few months earlier, in a two-week strike that the union labeled a "mass resignation" in order to steer clear of a state law against work stoppages by public employees; the union won its strongest contract ever—a 26-month, $135.4 million agreement. This strike, however, had exacerbated teacher-community tensions in some areas. Many parents accused teachers of abandoning children for selfish interests. Teachers, in turn, accused parents of serving as "scabs." Blacks kept some ghetto schools open, using mostly parents and a bloc of black teachers who crossed picket lines.

Despite earlier union support for the decentralization concept, Albert Shanker now declared, "Without a strong central authority [and safeguards] decentralization will be a movement toward apartheid, bringing forth extremists (black and white) and the creation of a huge community pork-barrel in which some can improve their economic lot at the expense of their own children." The union opposition to the Bundy Plan, according to a prescient analysis by Joseph Featherstone in *The New Republic,* "has the makings of a tragedy, for parents and teachers may not have

identical interests, but they do have interests in common against the school administration." Indeed the UFT had been active in setting up New York's three experiments in community participation. In the Washington, D.C., experiment with neighborhood control, the head of the local teachers' union has declared, "The parents are demanding, and are going to have, a greater say in the operation of the schools whether the teachers are with them or against them. We want to be with the parents and we have no intention of aligning ourselves with reactionary forces that fear community involvement."

7. *Decentralization is a shrewd effort to foist responsibility for the failure of the schools onto the shoulders of the poor.* Some critics saw in the plan a design by the establishment to let ghetto communities stew in their own juice. According to this thesis, the power structure, unable—or, worse, unwilling—to achieve quality education in the ghetto, would, by surrendering control to the communities, also shift the burden of failure to the victims themselves. Furthermore, the surrender would relieve the establishment of the need to allocate more resources to public education. As the notion was put in the union's statement on decentralization, "to turn over a starved school system to local control is merely a political tactic to shift blame for inevitable failure on a powerless local leadership from responsible city and state officials." The theory found credence even in high academic places. As the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education put it, "Lower the heat from the community by making the community directly responsible for the mess, the cynic concludes. So does the realist."

There are as few facts to refute this theory as there are to support it. The panel and its supporters asserted that low-income parents, given the substance of participation instead of the illusion provided by the middle-class PTA model, would be motivated to seek high-quality education. Furthermore, the panel asked, what are the alternatives?

Then U.S. Commissioner of Education Howe, who endorsed

the principle of decentralization in testimony before a state legislative committee, rejected the "shift of responsibility" argument:

> I would take issue with those who argue that decentralization of schools is a trap to shift responsibility for the conduct of education onto the shoulders of people who lack power, know-how, and money. It is, instead, an effort to give them a chance to learn the responsible use of power, and to build an access for them to the power exercised for the whole city by the City Board of Education.
>
> You cannot have it both ways: those who demand improvement must be willing to participate in its achievement. There is a role for criticism, but that role must exist within the framework of responsibility and accountability. The alternative is anarchy. Decentralization of control of education in our large cities does not mean handing over money and personnel selection to groups of self-appointed saviors of education who seek their own aggrandizement more directly than they seek new opportunities for young people. Instead, it means making democracy work in an orderly fashion among those who have never had the chance for participation in the affairs of the schools which serve their children.

What ghetto parents now have under a centralized system, others said, is inadequate education. The assumption that they are protected only under a system that purports to do something *for* them denies their potency. A so-called hard-headed view holds that giving poor people a role in their own institutions amounts to romanticizing the poor. The Bundy Panel contended, on the contrary, that, given the freedom and funds, people—poor or rich—will find whatever technical resources they require. The difference is that they will not be at the mercy of a failing, albeit professionally dominated, system. Under community control, it is held, the technicians and professionals would have to perform or be replaced. Of course, a school district might also fail under the proposed reorganization. The point, according to the advocates of decentralization, is that the plan opens a *variety* of routes through which success may be pursued. As things stand now, children march down the single centralized educational road, and, if they fall by the wayside, there is no alternative.

8. *The plan is a distraction from the need for greater comprehensive attacks on all social ills.* This argument, an enlargement of the one just noted, was articulated, among others, by Bayard Rustin, a civil rights leader whose ties to the black community collided with his long association with the labor movement. He had this to say about the New York City schools and the Bundy panel's plan:

> Every year there has been a new gimmick. First it was busses; the next year it was the [State Commissioner of Education] Allen Plan. Now these are forgotten. The following year it was talk about education parks. Last year it was the More Effective Schools program. This year it's decentralization. Next year it will be still another gimmick. The fundamental reason educators have become involved in this gimmickry is that they do not seem to understand that unless there is a master plan to cover housing, jobs, and health, every plan for the schools will fall on its face.

This argument was also pressed by the CSA:

> The approach of the Bundy Report is a superficial one in that it focuses on the schools alone without regard, except for incidental references, to other institutions or forces. It assumes that current social unrest can be appeased by an administrative restructuring of the schools system. The needs . . . for better housing, improved recreational facilities, higher education, job training, and placement, medical care and social services . . . are largely ignored.

The reply of advocates, of course, was that schools were a major instrument for upward mobility and that efforts to reform them could not be suspended until major social and economic needs were met. The Bundy Panel was not blind to these other factors. As the panel wrote in transmitting the report to the mayor, "We think it self-evident that education is only one instrument of progress"; also, as it noted, the panel had been asked to examine school decentralization, "not . . . to settle hard priorities between jobs, housing, and schools."

9. *The plan deals only with administration; it does not solve financial problems or contain any educational innovations.* Har-

vard's education dean said the proposed reorganization would improve the existing system but said flatly, "the system will still not run much better." The system was hopelessly underfinanced, he said, and "without new resources the only thing new will be the objects of criticism, the Community School Boards rather than 110 Livingston Street."

But the panel had acknowledged that "decentralization is no substitute for other deeply needed changes . . . in particular . . . the massive infusion of funds which the school system now needs," and supporters of the plan, while not denying the need for such funds, emphasized that the way the funds were spent was crucial. They noted that pupil failure had continued even while compensatory education funds, teacher salaries, and other school resources had increased. Their judgment was confirmed in subsequent appraisals of Title I (for example, the NAACP's report, "Is It Helping Poor Children?") and in the comments in President Nixon's 1970 education message about the disappointing results of compensatory-education efforts.

Other intellectual critics deprecated the Bundy Plan for its alleged lack of "new educational ideas." Staff members of the Center for Urban Education published a particularly strong "critical analysis" (from which, incidentally, the director of the organization disassociated himself). The failure of the center's staff to see pedagogical innovation in the plan was symptomatic of professional critical myopia. In fact, the Bundy Report did suggest a number of possible innovations. The report, among other things, touched on bilingual instruction, university-contract skill centers in reading and other subjects, curriculum research centers in individual schools, nongraded school organization, and tutorial arrangements. Other possibilities discussed were new career patterns for paraprofessionals and a process in which teacher aides would advance to professional status through the ranks of teaching assistant and associate teacher. The panel did not include any of these in its recommendations, for to have done so would have been to prescribe detailed styles of education for

communities, a common error of educational reformers that is precisely inimical to the principle of community self-determination.

What the Bundy Panel did recommend, however—the structural reorganization of school governance—is itself a fundamental educational innovation. Some academic critics fail to see that participation by parents—as equal partners and not through the sufferance of professionals—is educationally potent. As *The Saturday Review* noted, "Inevitably the 'education' that results [from having parents participate] will reach far beyond the classroom—into the homes and local institutions of the community."

The same educators who rail against children's environmental handicaps are doing battle against the entry of those great environmental agents—the parents and the community—into the school process. The school is a system. It needs energy, and parents and the community are great energy sources. Not only has formal education failed to tap them but it has so resisted them that this energy is now increasingly working against the professionals. Society does not know the full potential of this energy for improving the educational system, because it has never been tried, not even in middle-class schools. There is some evidence to be found, however, from Head Start and even from New York City summer school programs in which the regular rule book is thrown away. In such cases, parents perceive the school as "their" institution, and, whether they continue to stay at home or actually work in the school building, they become true partners with the professional, with all that implies for student motivation and incentive. At the very least, it is unlikely that students and their families in a participatory climate will continue to regard the school as an alien institution, indifferent to their needs. Reconnecting the school with the home is an educational innovation of the first magnitude.

"The aim of the Bundy Report is to reconnect the persons responsible for the children and renew the human purpose of education," said *The Saturday Review*. "In a city as vast and anony-

mous as New York, such communications—rather than high math and reading scores—may be the chief benefit of decentralizing the schools."

While critics of the Bundy Plan rapidly mobilized opposition, support for the plan grew slowly. (It was not until six months after the plan's publication that a citywide committee of respected leaders was formed to organize support for it.) Nevertheless, it was clear that there was a great deal of sentiment for some changes along the lines favored by the Bundy Panel. The United Parents Association, representing some 400,000 members, approved the proposals, with the reservation that the central board should be responsible for curriculum and safeguards against favoritism, bias, or influence-peddling by the local boards. Support also came from such prestigious groups as the Public Education Association and the Citizens Budget Commission, from several members of existing local school boards, and from most civil rights organizations.

Although school superintendents in many major cities gave the Bundy Report a cool reception, both U.S. Commissioner of Education Howe and one of his predecessors, Dr. Samuel Brownell, now a Yale University professor and formerly Detroit Superintendent of Schools, endorsed the proposals. The approach, said Brownell, "holds promise of meeting some of the fundamental challenges and problems that have remained immune to piecemeal, special approaches heretofore attempted."

Support sometimes came from surprising sources. Predictions that the plan would be embraced by the Parents and Taxpayers (PAT), a conservative New York group that opposes the use of busing or redistricting to achieve integration, proved unfounded. Mrs. Rosemary Gunning, leader of PAT forces, termed it an "untried hybrid system" and proposed, instead, a five-borough plan with boards elected by all residents. But California's conservative educational fundamentalist, Dr. Max Rafferty, aligned himself with progressives like Howe. "Every new idea attracts both nutty

friends and screwball enemies," wrote Rafferty, "but the [Bundy] proposal is basically a sound one. For too long we educators have been moving in a profoundly unhealthy direction, talking up the advantages of size and numbers and consolidation while at the same time paying lip service to the ideal of education for the individual."

While many critics of the plan opposed it because, in their opinion, it "went too far," there were those who felt it did not go nearly far enough. Some civil rights groups, for example, argued for totally independent community school districts within the city, rather than for the panel's federated plan. They charged that the plan would create a middle-class leadership in the ghettos "whose basic task is to keep the community from getting real control." It was, they said, "a pacification program." This hardly accorded with Alsop's claim that the plan is a surrender to wild-eyed black extremists. The contradiction was seldom noted, however, in the furious clash of opinion aroused by the report.

The suggestion that the plan did not go far enough was also implied in reservations expressed by Joseph Featherstone, who, while writing in general support of the Bundy Panel's design, believed that even districts of the size it suggested do not constitute communities in the true sense of the word. He was skeptical about how participatory the board-election process would be and suggested that it may be farfetched to assume that voting in board elections will help parents shed their feeling of powerlessness. In reply, Bundy Plan backers argued that participation goes well beyond the ballot. As the report itself noted, "Voting is not the sole measure of a participatory system. A decentralized school structure should encourage and create other means of parent participation."

Publication of the Bundy Plan was a major chapter in a long political and social dispute that, as of this writing, nearly two years later, is still under way. In that dispute, the plan itself took on as much symbolism as substance. If one or another of its details was sidetracked in the ebb and flow of alternative plans

and legislative and administrative struggle, its concept—meaningful participation of parents and community for urban education reform—remained at stage center. The plan, under its name, had become too controversial to serve as the blueprint the mayor presented to the 1968 legislature, but its main components formed the backbone of legislation proposed in both 1968 and 1969.

The panel's plan advocated legitimizing the role of parents and the community in the educational decision-making process. In effect, it would have provided a measure of community control. By no means would it have shifted total power to the community, which some community-control advocates now consider prerequisite to the concept. The decentralization law that was finally adopted by the New York Legislature in 1969 fell considerably short even of the Bundy Plan.

The Bundy Plan *per se* had taken its place in history, but both the proponents and opponents of the new pattern of the New York City schools knew, though they would not publicly acknowledge it, that the plan had mapped out the ground on which the legislative struggle would be waged. A different but parallel struggle followed in the wake of the Bundy Plan. It is to this that the next chapter turns.

6

New York—Crucible for Community Control

> There is no squabbling so violent as that between people who accepted an idea yesterday and those who will accept the same idea tomorrow.—CHRISTOPHER MORLEY (*Religico Journalistici*)

Until real community control of the public schools is established in some large American city, the concept will be associated in most minds with the three "demonstration districts" of New York City. These clusters—comprising eighteen schools, out of nearly a thousand in the city—were the focus of tempestuous events that escalated urban educational issues into a maelstrom of political and social strife and thrust the phrase "community control" into the national vocabulary. In the two and a half years from their feeble beginnings to their scheduled abolition in 1970 by legislative fiat, the demonstration districts have been a microcosm of the thick net of urban politics, of the nation's open racial polarization, and of the difficulty of achieving educational reform in the face of tradition, established interests, and fear.

A review of both the origin of the demonstration districts and the play of forces that led to their demise goes far in illuminating urban educational issues as well as the politics and perils of reform attempts. To begin with, the demonstration districts, whose