

Distortion on Busing

Ever since Governor Wallace scored such spectacular successes in the Democratic primaries by exploiting the issue of school busing, it was obvious that demagogic distortion of this issue would be a staple of the Presidential campaign.

The expectation is now being borne out by the heavy stress that was put on totally misleading presentations of the issue at the Republican convention. In the campaign documentary, "The Nixon Years—Change Without Chaos," the President says he considers it wrong to bus little children to kindergartens one and a half hours from their homes, when they could walk to a school in their neighborhood. Vice President Agnew, in his acceptance speech at Miami Beach, opposed "busing children back and forth over long distances" to "seek arbitrary racial balance in each school." And Mr. Nixon underscored his determination to pound away at the same deceptive code word by inveighing against "an arbitrary racial balance" in a Michigan antibusing stronghold Thursday.

These descriptions of busing bear no resemblance to existing realities. They completely distort the issue as well as the rulings by the Supreme Court, including the most recent opinions by the "Nixon Court" itself. Deliberately obscured is the fact that the Supreme Court has never demanded busing to create racial balance. Indeed, recent rulings have specifically held that long-distance busing is neither constitutional nor educationally desirable. The reality is that court-ordered busing—usually the result of massive and prolonged resistance to desegregation—affects an insignificant proportion of the vast number of pupils who are routinely bused to school in the United States.

Yet, the deliberate resort to these distortions was clearly foretold last March when the President's demagogic call for a "moratorium" on busing made it plain that the scare potential of this bogus issue would be milked to the utmost throughout the election campaign.

The Democratic-controlled House of Representatives got the message. Its passage, by a vote of 282 to 102, of an extreme antibusing bill would literally turn back the clock of history. The measure not only prohibits virtually all busing for purposes of desegregation, regardless of the pupils' ages or grades; it also permits the reopening of previously settled cases involving court-ordered desegregation. The bill is clearly segregationist in intent and potential impact. The House apparently was determined to do as much mischief as possible, in total disregard of the rights of black children.

Although many Senators have in recent months also been giving in to the lure of expediency, the Senate has thus far held the line against the segregationist onslaught. This bill provides a crucial test of the Senate's resolve. It would be a tragedy if it now surrendered to the Administration's divisive antibusing gamesmanship.