

WINSTON-SALEM CHRONICLE

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Crimes...For Poor People Only?

Recent incidents of alleged criminal activity by high government officials, corporate heads, and government agencies have caused concern from the general public. The problem seems to be that only the poor and disadvantaged folks commit crimes, while high echelon folk only commit wrongdoings and errors that seem easy to be forgiven by the law. John Q. Public is concerned about this inequitable administration of the law, and justifiably so.

We have not heard anyone addressing themselves to this issue which is at the root of the contempt many people have toward the judicial system. No one appears to be complaining that existing laws are too harsh, but that the laws are not administered justly.

When one man goes into court and is found guilty of stealing \$500 and is sentenced to 10 years in prison while another man is found guilty of embezzling \$50,000 and gets an 18 month suspended sentence, we can understand the feelings that people have.

The Nixons and the Erlichmans and the Colsons all committed crimes far more heinous than most, yet none are in prison and the ones who did only stayed there a

short while. This only serves to inflame the fires of contempt that have been burning far too long.

We heard one East Winston alderman attempt to address the inequitable administration of justice on the local level at a Board of Aldermen meeting recently and no one paid much attention to him. We saw people in the meeting actually laughing and shaking their heads as though what the alderman was saying was utterly ridiculous.

We do not think it is funny nor ridiculous to try to solve a problem that has 13,000 mostly poor, black males in the prison system of North Carolina.

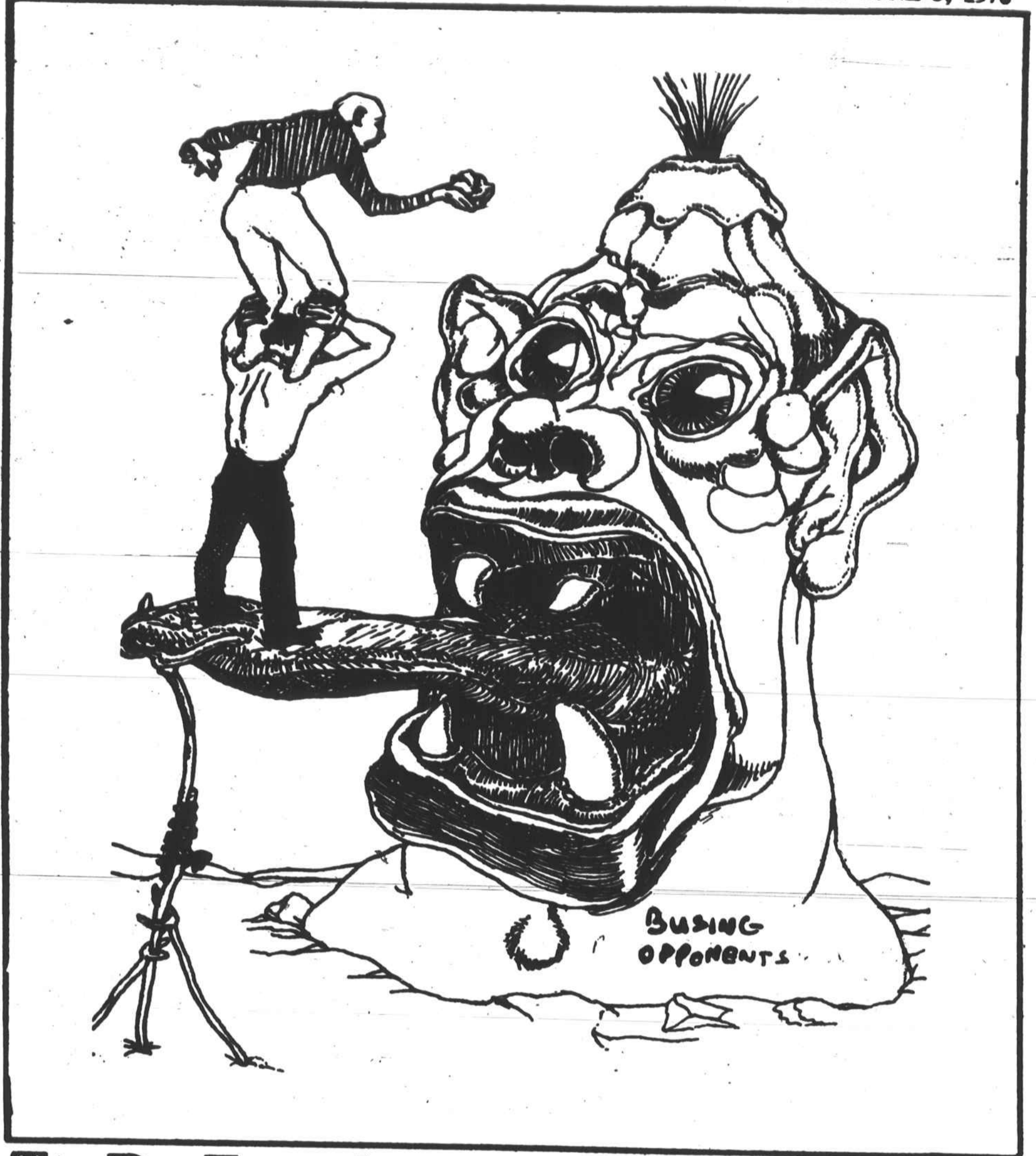
We hope that some attention will be given this problem by those people seeking to hold public office. That is an issue that should be talked about. We also hope that the alderman who brought it up in the last Board of Aldermen meeting will bring it up again and again until the rest of the aldermen realize that a crime is not just something only poor folk commit. A crime is a crime not a wrongdoing or an error and once committed, status ought not to be a protective device.

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To Be Equal By Vernon Jordan, Jr.

Whatever the outcome of the Boston busing crisis and the appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court to modify that city's desegregation plan, it is clear that busing is on its way back as a political football.

That fact alone says something about American politics and about the nature of leadership on the national and local scenes.

A little history is in order. In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional. This means that almost all students graduating from college this spring were born after that decision--and almost all of them have attended segregated schools.

In effect, there's been a twenty-two year moratorium on ending segregation in America's schools. The constitutional rights of white and black children to be educated in desegregated schools has been ignored.

Imagine the outcry if constitutional rights to free speech or the press were suspended for so long a time. But on this issue, there has been resistance and sabotaging of court orders to bring about the end of segregated schools.

In 1971 the Supreme Court ruled that federal district judges have the right to order busing or other means of

desegregating the schools if local officials refuse to do it.

In many towns, officials read the writing on the wall and abandoned their attempts to frustrate the process of desegregation. The formulated plans with community participation and in those areas, no one hears any more about 'forced busing' or court orders.

But in other cities, and Boston is one of them, school officials refused to cooperate, refused to follow the law, and refused to lift a finger to desegregate. Instead of trying to win community acceptance of desegregation, those officials abdicated their moral and official responsibilities, thus insuring that the courts would do what they themselves were too cowardly to do.

Such local officials also made a political football of busing. They preached massive resistance, just as die-hard southern segregationists did back in the '50s, and they helped to fan the flames of discontent. Boston's rock-throwers got the headlines and were properly condemned, but the real culprits were those officials who had the power to bring about peaceful changes and instead, encourage resistance that inevitably leads to violence.

Instead of backing the

courts, successive national Administrations have themselves questioned to worsen matters. They have forgotten that busing in this context is no longer a matter of opinion, but a proper means to remedy illegal denial of constitutional rights.

What Eisenhower understood is that constitutional rights of people must not be permitted to become pawns in political campaigns. In stark contrast to that leadership is the recent order by President Ford to the Justice Department to try to get the Supreme Court to reverse or alter its 1971 decision giving the district judges wide latitude to order busing.

The political motives of such a move are transparent, especially in an election year. But part of the reason anti-busing is so potent a political consideration lies in the efforts of politicians in both parties to win votes by condemning busing. If they had been as enthusiastic in condemning segregation, things would be a lot different today.

The real problem lies in the rampant unconstitutional segregation that still exists. And the solution to that problem is to integrate the schools, if necessary through busing. But where are the national figures with the political courage and moral leadership to say so?