

from  
**Upholding the Law**  
**and Other Observations**  
by  
Peter E. Hendrickson

**The Full-Disservice Treatment**



Well, *both* autumn colors are now (or will soon be) decorating the landscape as the ubiquitous orange constriction zone barrels are joined once again by their more mobile cousins, the rolling yellow obstructions known as school buses. The bumblebee-like movement of the buses, restlessly rumbling from one brief stopping place to another-- if not quite in defiance of the laws of physics, certainly in defiance of the laws of traffic efficiency-- differs considerably from the inscrutable habits of the diminutive but more numerous barrel branch of the family, which will lie about in enormous herds in a state of absolute torpor, oblivious to all external conditions until, motivated by some stimulus as yet beyond the understanding of science, they rise as one in the dead of night and move en masse to a new grazing? communing? meditating? spot.

Nonetheless, the two seemingly disparate lifeforms are of a kind-- both symbiotic partners of larger organisms evolved over the course of decades to share in blood-meals sucked from the veins of tax payers. However, while the orange barrels and their partner/host road construction industry are merely the unavoidable byproduct of a more-or-less universally beneficial good, the school buses serve narrow private interests-- those of the public education industry and its clients-- and represent two

direct subsidies by which important (and in the one case, subtle) costs are transferred from those clients to the rest of us in order to keep the marginal price of an inferior education product from pushing a dangerous portion of those clients and their political support over the departure threshold.

Schoolbuses have increasingly been transformed from a simple transportation utility into components of a full-service babysitting product as the decline of the schools from more-or-less sincerely intended educational institutions down to combination academic day-care center/social engineering factories has proceeded. They are relied upon to help offset the moral price of the years lost to the child with the benefit of convenience to the parents.

The welfare school industry, despite having firmly fastened itself upon the body-politic long ago, is increasingly dependent upon such transformational and value-added peripherals as its nominal justification becomes more and more obviously dysfunctional and counter-productive and its client base less stable. We've all seen what can happen-- when another type of welfare was reformed recently with the addition of work requirements tied to the benefits, a very large portion of the users decided the pelf wasn't worth the effort and left the system, seriously threatening the justification of thousands of industry jobs. Many parents, presented with the prospect of not only yielding their child up to a lousy education but having to inconvenience themselves in the delivery of the victim as well, would crumble off the plantation at the margin.

Let's face it, the vast majority of public schools are held to the most insignificant standards, being measured academically merely on a relative basis and for the sake of appearances, and meaningfully assessed only insofar as they provide a reasonably safe storage place for the children of working parents. The constant shifting of the bar downwards puts the lie to any academic pretensions: the lowering of the

SAT standards, both a few years ago with an automatic addition to all scores of 100 unearned points, and then lately with the simplification of the test questions; “social promotion” right up to and including graduation (and the consequent dilution of course-work so that socially promoted students aren’t made to suffer low self-esteem during classes in which they wouldn’t belong if curriculum standards were maintained); “remedial” courses in colleges and universities across the country-- indeed, a college education has become what once was a high-school education, just too late to be as well absorbed, and cluttered with the distractions of the behaviors and license attendant upon young adulthood.

The Mackinac Center for Public Policy just released a study revealing that even within the context of today’s grossly lower standards fully a third of graduating high school seniors in the state of Michigan lack basic skills in math, reading and writing. And remember, that’s 1/3 of the *graduates*. While it appears virtually impossible to acquire accurate statewide numbers due to shameless book-cooking, Detroit’s last reliable published graduation rate of 29.7% for far-and-away the largest single district in the state (some smaller districts have even lower rates) plus a national average 74% for the rest of the state suggests that it is likely that no more than ½ of the 18-year-olds processed through the public schools achieve even shaky skills in core subjects. Other states are likely to be little different.

Contrast that with the competition. The nascent home-schooling community is just a few years old, has only a rudimentary infrastructure of curricular materials and cultural resources, and is staffed by non-specialists who fit daily instruction in along with all the other responsibilities of homemaking and child-rearing-- frequently including the simultaneous management of disparately aged students following completely different lesson plans. Nonetheless, home schools are already outperforming the best of the 100+ year-old

public school systems despite such system's huge expenditures under optimal conditions of specialization and support. Even private religious schools, asking tuition of just a fraction of the public school spending per pupil are uniformly recognized as providing a much superior product on virtually every front, and often despite devoting some portion of the schoolday (often a significant portion) to sectarian material.

So, the public school industry peddles convenience, safety, enrichment, and the socialization of Club Ed,-- *If you're not there, you're square! (The motto used to be, "If you're not here, you're queer", but they decided to drop that one a few years ago as not making sense anymore).*

And they come through:

- They'll pick your kids up more-or-less at the curb, amuse them all day long, equip Mom and Dad with plenty of 'round-the-water-cooler grist about "new" math and "whole language arts", and send home plenty of "A"s and not too much homework.
- They'll teach Johnny and Janey that an answer that's close is as good as one that's right; that cheating pays; and that everyone is entitled to self-respect just for showing up.
- They'll periodically explore your child's orifices, and periodically explain to him or her how to explore the orifices of other children.
- They'll have school plays, and field-trips, and cops in the hallways; and they'll teach your child to be politically active-- chiefly by sending them home with flyers urging "yes" votes on the latest school millage increase, and

occasionally by busing them to the state capital to be exploited in a photo-op for some liberal cause.

- They'll give you school concerts to attend; sporting events to cheer at; and annual get-ready-for-school shopping events during which you can get in a little quality time.
- They'll teach your child to worship the Earth Mother and they'll send him or her to the Gay, Lesbian, Transgendered and Bisexual Community Resource Center (conveniently located next to the school nurse's office), for lectures on how to think correctly.
- They'll introduce your child to a library in which no copy of "Huckleberry Finn" will be found but where "Heather Has Two Mommies" will, and which still has 14 copies of "I, Rigoberto Menchu".
- They'll condition your child to perceive the State as the giver of wisdom, morality, and law.
- They'll deliver your kids as lifelong customers to whichever soft-drink company won the dispensing machine bid-- and give the advertisers on Channel One a pretty good shot at them as well.
- When all that is over, if you're not ready to put up with the little darlings yet, the school will store them in latch-key until you are.

They really are trying to be full-service crèches.

Considering the scope of this dedicated and generally harmful effort to add value, focusing on buses for comment may

seem a bit off-target. But despite its stature as a Norman Rockwell cultural icon the prosaic schoolbus invites, even demands criticism as the most visible, most audacious interface between the welfare education industry and those of us not directly subjecting our children to its ministrations. Every workday morning, from September through June, nearly all of us on our way to a hard day earning the money taken from us for the support of the welfare schools will face extra time lost due to being subordinated to those bright yellow schoolbuses during our commute. Not only are our pockets picked to pay for the education of other people's kids, but we have to be inconvenienced on a daily basis to boot.

Imagine that along with a monthly food-stamp allotment came a card authorizing the beneficiary to cut in at the head of the checkout line in any grocery store. That would last about as long as it took voters to get their congressperson on the phone. Imagine if such a policy were being relied upon, or at least serving, as a perk to help keep food-stamp recipients from abandoning the program and providing for their own needs at their own expense. Such a thing would be indefensible. But that's just the role that schoolbuses fill. Much of the rest of what our taxes are spent on in the public schools do the same, but without the in-your-face, added-cost manner.

The extra time the rest of us spend stuck behind these free rides for the neighbor's kids is time denied to our own families. It's more than enough that we're paying for the product from which they're benefiting. They should handle the shipping themselves.