

Outburst Could Prompt Board Overhaul

By MARVIN KEMP

By DON HOENSHILL

analysis

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Gov. Milliken has forecast a general overhaul of the troubled State Board of Education in the fall session of the Legislature and has given the back of his hand to board member James F. O'Neill of Livonia. If big changes come, it will be O'Neill's drive to oust Dr. Ira Polley as superintendent of public instruction that broke the board's back.

Lansing - watchers combed Milliken's words in a press conference Wednesday for something solid in the way of educational reform, the reason for the fall session. Instead, Milliken obliquely belied O'Neill.

ASKED for reaction to O'Neill's campaign against Polley, he said:

"I think that points up an intolerable situation under which the state superintendent of public instruction is now functioning. (He) comes to a board meeting and never really knows

whether he has got five votes on his side or three votes... whether he will lose his job or whether he will lose his job."

"And I think it suggests to me a system which is simply not working, not satisfactory. In the immediate case (O'Neill's demand that Polley be ousted), I think Dr. Polley is doing a good job and I support him."

In the same context, Milliken said he "may have some suggestions to make" to lawmakers when they return Oct. 6 that it "could be a part of" his program for educational reform with election only a year away.

O'NEIL'S LATEST out-Polley campaign started in public July 8 in a board meeting belated by many of the 600 citizens in the audience which made a shambles of attempts to consider sex education guidelines.

The latest development came Wednesday night when the board sidetracked O'Neill's attempts to oust the superintendent because Polley was on vacation at Cape Cod. O'Neill said at a press conference earlier in the day he would force the issue that night.

Critics said O'Neill tried to get Polley fired while he was on vacation, and had not returned for the meeting. Since July 22, the Polley matter has been an agenda item scheduled to be taken up by the board in September.

Polley, 52, was a Phi Beta Kappa who came out of the University of Minnesota in 1954 with a doctorate. He has been executive director of the Michigan Council of State College Presidents, state controller under former Gov. G. Mennen Williams and John B. Swainson, and a veteran administrator.

O'NEIL, 46, attended the University of Michigan, the University of Detroit, Wayne State University, Indiana University

Politicians in the Republican ranks say O'Neill is embarrassing the party and hurting the GOP image at a delicate time. A critic says he has 'sincerity and some good ideas' at his best, a carping critic at his worst.

and Albion College, receiving bachelor's and master's degrees. He is now a Ford Motor Co. employee in the design center.

O'Neill's public service includes a term on the Schoolcraft College Board of Trustees (1961-63) and the State Board of Education (1963-64). He was elected to the present board in 1966. His term expires Jan. 1, 1970.

But the battle goes beyond the careers of both men. Polley was associated with Democrats. O'Neill is a Republican of conservative leanings.

O'Neill — whom one critic credited with "sincerity and some ideas" — has been a political gadfly in the most effective sense at his best, and a carping critic who fits facts to his whim at his worst, a leading GOP spokesman said.

THE FIRST hassle of this present term started over a letter O'Neill wrote on board stationery June 11, 1968 to President Johnson, Republican leaders in Congress, Chief Justice Earl Warren and Dr. Milton Eisenhower.

The letter attacked all branches of the federal government for allowing the "virus of Violence" to grow in the land. One of his suggestions: "How do we correct this? One way would be to establish a parliamentary form of government similar to Canada and England. Then, when the president lost a vote of confidence in Congress, an election would be held within weeks to provide new leadership."

For this, described as entry into a field foreign to the charge to the board and a misuse of board stationery, O'Neill was censured by his colleagues. Polley at this time was given a vote of confidence.

ON JULY 22, this year, O'Neill

was again brought to a censure vote, which lost 4 to 3. Significantly, it was the same four who elected Dr. Peter Oppewall as president with a vote from former chairman, Edwin L. Nowak.

At that time, the defeated resolution protested O'Neill's using the public meeting as a forum to attack Polley. It said in part:

"Mr. James F. O'Neill used the occasion to extend his right to express differences and opposition to the recommendations of the (citizens') committee and publicly impugned the integrity and procedures of the staff and the advisory committee and accused the state superintendent of public instruction of misjudgment, incompetence, or duplicity, and called upon him to resign from the office."

The resolution also described O'Neill's performance as "scurrilous outburst" and said it contained "many inaccurate assertions."

O'NEIL WAS incensed in June after Polley distributed a bibliography of sex education materials compiled by the advisory board. The lists were compiled only to inform local schoolmen of what had been written on the subject.

Lawmakers and others said O'Neill seized upon this as a usurpation of board authority rather than an administrative function and that he later called the bibliography "the Polley's sex education guidelines" on a press release.

O'Neill has been the star at the public sex education hear-



JAMES F. O'NEIL
State Board Member

ings now underway. At Warren, observers attending said he distributed a press release which gave the John Birch Society as an authority on sex education policy.

His main policy target is the list of publications written by or endorsed by SIECUS, a national group promoting sex education. Board members said they knew of no district which has chosen SIECUS materials for use.

IN LIVONIA, O'Neill created a stir shortly before the June 9 election and during a hot battle over sex education by ascribing "barnyard standards" to the bibliographies.

Politicians in the Republican ranks said O'Neill is embarrassing the party and is hurting the GOP image at a delicate time. The governor, the Legislature and major elective jobs will be up grabs next year, as will two of the seats on the board.

O'Neill has charged also that Polley has allowed key administrative personnel to leave without resigning. Polley has been silent except to deny any plans for resigning. He is preparing a reply to O'Neill on each of the points he raised.

But it is known that Polley

reacted to O'Neill's charge that he failed to mail to libraries and educators a third set of sex education guidelines submitted by O'Neill.

This set was informally given to the board. The first two were those of the advisory committee and those of Mrs. Suzanne Tally, an advisory committee member as a minority report. Observers called it significant that O'Neill's guidelines used much of the same language as those submitted by Mrs. Tally.

In any case, Polley said confirmed that O'Neill's guidelines were mailed to the same list as soon as possible.

O'NEIL BLASTED Polley for holding up for board approval the transfer of the Lansing meeting on sex education when the crowd grew larger than the board chamber would accommodate, then attacked Polley for not clearing administrative detail with the board.

At the Wednesday meeting, O'Neill was told by Board Member Marilyn Jean Kelly, a Democrat, that his bid to oust Polley was "a flimsy fabrication for self-serving purposes."

O'Neill's plan now is to "transfer" Polley to associate superintendent for higher education and make the present holder of that position, Dr. John Porter, superintendent. Porter has been quoted as saying he wouldn't take the job if it were offered.

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