

No more bushwhacking with Democratic caucus

Clear-thinking voters really needn't be upset over all this flap about the state Democratic Party delegate selection process.

With the Dems opting for a caucus system nobody loses the right to do anything — except those who delight in bushwhacking the other guy's primary results.

In recent weeks we've read a lot about how a "meaningful" presidential primary is going the way of the whooping crane.

Some indignant legislators (who are responsible for the whole mess, anyway) are screaming that the people's rights are being taken away if the Democratic Party negates the results of the open primary and uses the caucus, instead.

Nonsense — pure poppycock.

Michigan Democrats, on order from the national party, asked the legislature for a closed primary. The Lansing lawmakers have refused to budge.

hence the caucus system.

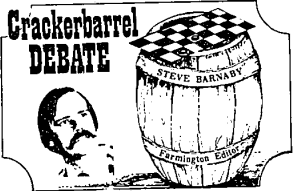
While a caucus does make it more difficult for the average Joe Blow to go cast a vote, it also insures that a voter will have to use a bit more intelligence than a zoo baboon before pulling down the lever.

In short, the caucus system will allow only Democrats to vote in a Democratic primary. So what?

STRONG PARTY politics is an important part of American government. It gives voters a chance to affiliate themselves with a philosophy — a style of running government.

If voters are unsure of the candidates, they should at least have the confidence of a party vote.

And parties are made up of people — just like you and I. The caucus system will force voters to think about party affiliation. It will strengthen and purify our party system.



To participate in a caucus, all a Michigan voter has to do is join the Democratic Party by Feb. 26 — not such a grievous sin. The reality, of course, is that fewer persons will participate because of political apathy. That is a grievous sin. But that's not

the fault of the Democratic party.

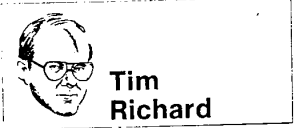
Certainly, a closed primary would be preferable over a caucus system, but the wrangling in the legislature has killed that option.

TAKE A moment to examine "open" presidential primary results in Michigan.

Recall that George Wallace swept the Democratic primary in 1972. He garnered more than 809,000 votes against George McGovern's 425,000 and Hubert Humphrey's 249,000.

In 1976 Republicans didn't have the luxury of playing in the other kids backyard.

While only 330,000 "Republicans" cast votes in the 1972 primary, more than a million cast a ballot in 1976. Either a lot of Michigan voters decided to change parties between 1972 and 1976 or somebody was playing games and causing havoc in the other guy's camp.



Old Socrates gets assessed

Socrates, the venerable Greek philosopher, slumped onto a bench in the mall next to his friend Realitorides and groaned as he pointed to his property tax bill.

"Do you perceive what is happening to our assessments?" the white-haired sage inquired of Realitorides. "The general cost of living is rising 13 percent a year, but the assessment on my humble shed is rising far faster. Is this clearly not an injustice to one of my years who is living on a pension and a few dividends?"

"Nay, not so," responded Realitorides. "It is instead a sign of your highly advantageous position. Rejoice, O Socrates."

Socrates frowned in bewilderment. "How can such increases in my assessment be a boon?" he asked. "House values are increasing faster than industrial and commercial values, and so the tax limitation amendment has little meaning for us homeowners."

REALTORIDES SMILED a tolerant smile. "Your home, O Philosopher, is the best investment you can make. It is a hedge against inflation. Since home prices are increasing faster than the general rate of inflation, you are always ahead of the game. And as there is no end in sight to inflation, your investment improves with the market."

"Is that so?" said Socrates. "Well, let us examine your proposition a little further. Tell me, if I buy a stock and hold it without selling, am I taxed on the value of the stock?"

"Assuredly not," said Realitorides. "You pay a capital gains tax on the gain you realize only when you sell the stock."

"But as my house increases in value, I am taxed on the 'book' value or assessment every year — is that not so?" Socrates went on.

Realitorides blanched. "Well, ah — yes, I suppose it is so," he replied.

"And I have that tax liability even if my income doesn't rise to meet it — isn't that so?" the philosopher went on.

"Yes, I suppose it is so," said Realitorides.

"Some 'investment,'" said Socrates. Then he went on.

"SUPPOSE I SELL a high-priced stock. Am I not then able to find a low-priced stock to invest in? Even when the stock market is high, are there not many stocks selling for less than book value?"

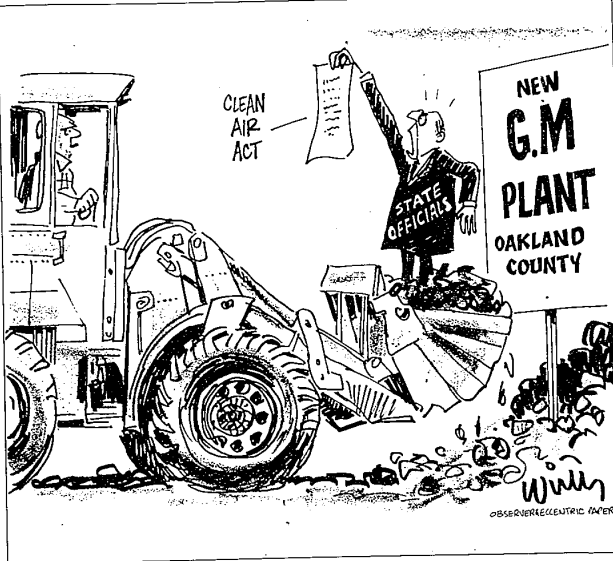
Realitorides thought, then responded, "Yes, if you shop diligently, you can find a low-priced stock after you have sold a high-priced stock."

"But what about my house?" said Socrates. "If I sell this house, which you try to tell me is such a good investment, can I buy another house of the same size, in good repair, for less money?" Answer, O Realitorides.

"No," said Realitorides, "for all house prices are high. You would have to find a smaller house, or one in poor repair, or one in a bad neighborhood in order to find a cheaper house."

"Well, then, friend Realitorides," said Socrates, "if my house rises in value each year, but if my property taxes eat up that increase, and if I can't gain from my investment unless I sell my house, and if this so-called investment is costing me increasing amounts to heat, to maintain and to insure — then my house, while a comfortable place to live in, is most assuredly a bad investment."

Realitorides sputtered, "Socrates, you make housing sound worse than used cars..." but the aged philosopher didn't hear him. He trudged off, his shoulders stooped more than ever.



Oh, those nostalgic days when there were alleys

During the course of a recent conversation with several members of the younger generation, The Stroller happened to mention that he was born and raised in an alley back in the Pennsylvania Dutch country.

"An alley?" one of the young lads repeated with a puzzled look on his face. "What's an alley? I never heard of one."

The remark stunned The Stroller for a moment. Then it dawned on him that alleys passed out of existence long ago and now can be listed in the limbo of forgotten things.

If the young lad had looked in Webster's dictionary, he would have learned that an alley is a passageway in the middle of a city block that gives access to the rear of buildings.

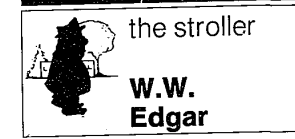
But that possibility wouldn't have satisfied him and he would have wondered no doubt how it happened that The Stroller was born and raised in that sort of a setting.

THE HOME in which The Stroller lived before he followed Horace Greeley's advice to come west, was in between two main streets and was faced on one side by a high board fence and between two barns.

In those days, long before the automobile became popular, the folks on the main street usually built a barn at the end of their lots after deeding a portion of the ground to the utility companies for the erection of poles to carry telephone and electric wires. They never were on the main street.

With the coming of the automobile these barns were turned into garages. And where the owners didn't have automobiles, they erected houses for the lower income families. For instance, the rent on our little home of four rooms and a hallway was a mere \$5 a month at the turn of the century.

With the erection of the utility poles, the need came for more space to accommodate the company's trucks. These alleys became thoroughfares of not less than 12 or more than 16 feet in width. So, in our house, we looked at a high board fence that was



only 16 feet away. Such conditions wouldn't be allowed today.

The coming of the automobile, plus the increase in population helped bring about the elimination of alleys. The owners of the "horseless carriage" soon found out that the alleys were too narrow in which to make the turn into the building and the change was made. In fact, that's how the present day garage in influential neighborhoods has become part of the residence.

ASIDE FROM THAT, with the population increase, the land became too valuable and in many cases the utility companies were forced to place the wires underground and eliminate the poles.

This brought about the passing of the alley and now these narrow passageways are in the limbo of forgotten things along with such things as private shaving mugs in the barbershops and spittoons — the forerunners of cuspidors that also are now only memories.

Mere mention of an alley today calls to mind one of The Stroller's favorite stories of his mother.

One evening while we were with her on a shopping trip, mother overheard a lady mention something derogatory about the kids in the alley.

Thinking the women meant her and her children, mother walked over to her and said:

"I'll have you know that you can raise just as nice roses in the alley as you can in the street."

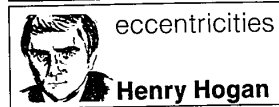
Contrary quotes

"People come here from the east and can't understand why we have this tradition of open primaries. . . The 1972 primary was what soured Democrats on the presidential primary."

— Democrat Aldo Vagnozzi (1980)

"No longer. . . will there stand between the voter and the official a political machine with a complicated system of caucuses and conventions, by the easy manipulation of which it thwarts the will of the voter and rules official conduct. If the voter is competent to cast his ballot at the general election . . . he is equally competent to vote directly at the primary election for the nomination of the candidates of his party."

— Sen. Robert LaFollette Sr. (1900)



Will gov't. derail GM?

It's very difficult to run a business these days.

Inflation is rampant. Employees have cost-of-living contracts, so expenses increase automatically as inflation climbs.

The only way to hold final prices is to increase productivity, but productivity has been lagging in this country for the last year.

One way to increase productivity is to build new, more efficient plants — but there lies the rub.

Every economist will tell you that the cause of inflation today is our federal government's policy of deficit spending.

THIS SAME government causing inflation is restricting new plant construction by its clean air regulations.

The state of Michigan has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. To encourage new industries to come into the state, the Michigan Legislature enacted a property tax relief program for new plants.

To get the legislation enacted, it added this proviso: Existing companies may not move their plants from one municipality to another in the state and get the property tax break without the consent of the municipality losing the facility.

Therefore, the tax relief program works against already situated businesses in the state if they want to expand to build a new, modern plant, because no municipality will consent to lose its tax base unless it is compensated — somehow.

ALL THIS leads to General Motors' recent announcement that it would like to build a new, ultra-modern plant in the northern part of Oakland County to replace its 35-year-old assembly plant in Pontiac.

If GM can't get tax relief plus a clean air permit from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), it will look for a site in another state.

To get the city of Pontiac to consent to the move and thus get the tax relief, GM announced it will keep the older plants in the city of Pontiac and convert them to a different use. Thus, Pontiac will not lose the property tax base.

This appeared to solve the problem until Pontiac looked at its city income tax. It assesses a 1 percent income tax on residents and 0.5 percent tax on non-residents.

Even though it won't lose property tax, 7,000 jobs will be moving out of Pontiac, and Pontiac will lose the income tax revenue on those workers now living outside of Pontiac but working there.

ON THE CLEAN AIR front, because of Detroit's pollution problems, a clean air permit won't be forthcoming from the EPA unless GM can get clean air rights from some business that is reducing its bad air, which normally means going out of business.

Will GM fight inflation by improving productivity?

Will Oakland County get a new plant and new tax base?

If they don't, you can look to governmental regulations as the culprit.



Did you know that the city of Warren is as old as the state itself, going back to April 3, 1837? For a while it was known as Alba, then was renamed Alba in 1838. But only 11 months later, its name was changed again to Warren.

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