

editorial opinion

Headlee should point finger of blame at self



Tim Richard

In Dick Headlee's demonology, the bad guys are always the "bureaucrats." They don't have many votes, they don't have slick public relations firms, and they don't try to be flamboyant.

Headlee, whose name is on the 1978 state tax limitation amendment, was at it again recently in Troy, where he was raking the local assessor over the coals.

His five-page handout, on the blue paper of McMaster Associates Public Relations, doesn't even mention Assessor Ernest Reschke's name. Bureaucrats are easier to attack when they're nameless, and besides, you don't want to make it easier for reporters to get the guy's name and ask for a reply.

What Headlee was saying about assessments in March of 1980 wasn't new. Back in October of 1979, Clair S. Simons, deputy assessor of Ypsilanti Township, was writing in the Michigan Township News that the Headlee amendment was going to be applied inequitably, and that homeowners were going to get socked.

HERE'S WHAT IS happening, not just in Troy, but in every city and township that has a mix of residential and business property:

Inflation is running rampant in residential real estate. Construction firms, trade unions and those who succumb to the siren song of "Buy Now" are to blame, but Headlee doesn't put the finger on them.

Business property, however, doesn't turn over as much. When was the last time GM's Livonia spring and bumper plant changed hands, or even a McDonald's? With so few transactions, it's tough to jack up assessments.

Meanwhile, general inflation ran around 11 percent last year. Thus, the assessment process is allowed to raise the total value of property in a community by 11 percent.

To keep it simple, let's say we have a community which is half residential, half business property. Let's say residential property has gone up 22 percent, industrial property has gone up zero, and general inflation is up 11 percent.

Instead of all assessments going up 11 percent, however, houses get raised 22 and business zero, and it's apparently all within the law.

SIMONS, THE Ypsi Township fellow, spotted the trouble five months before Headlee's amendment. "This amendment," Simons said, "was not intended to operate at the assessment level, not on individual assessments or taxes."

He went on: "Inflation is extremely variable between classes (of property) and non-existent in personal property (business inventory and equipment, which must be assessed by historical cost, not market value)."

Headlee and Robert Tisch, the would-be tax-cutter, will be on the stump again in 1980 with more proposed solutions.

There are some extremely technical improvements that can be made, and they deserve consideration by the Michigan Legislature.

But those improvements won't be made by tiny little Headlee and Tisch committees working quietly in closed rooms and then hitting the public with constitutional amendments on which we can vote only "yes" or "no."

A constitution is meant to be a framework for government. It is not, and cannot be, a repository for extremely detailed tax laws like the Headlee and Tisch amendments which have never been subjected to the pulling and hauling of the legislative process.

Voters in 1980 should be wary of both Headlee and Tisch.



Get with it, lawmakers

Gutless actions jeopardize subway

Bring out the big smelly cigars, shut the door and fill up the room with smoke.

The Michigan Legislature has lapsed into old-fashioned early 20th century political form.

Oh, don't get me wrong. The state reps aren't doing anything illegal. But many are acting rather foolish, playing inside political games with the Woodward corridor subway plan.

Their Keystone Kops performance almost could be construed as comical if the consequences weren't quite so serious.

Presently, the entire \$1.5 billion project is in jeopardy because some outstate and suburban legislators are balking at approval of a \$20 million engineering study necessary to get the project moving.

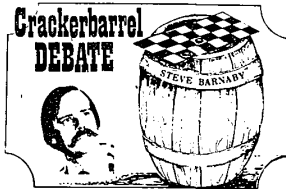
The reasons for opposition vary. Some believe the outcounties and suburbs are being shortchanged. Others don't like the plan simply because they don't like Detroit getting anything. Still others are opposed because they dislike Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and blacks in general.

But the majority in opposition have taken a negative stand just because they lack the guts to stand up to their constituents.

Instead of being lawmakers, they are wandering around the House chambers in attempts to wheel and deal out of the SEMTA plan.

IT TAKES little imagination to picture their antics. There they sit in some conference room, maps taped to the walls. With great bravado, they dissect and redissect the Woodward corridor.

Chop off a few miles here, add a surface rail



there. In short compromise the much needed subway to death.

But underneath all the huffing and puffing are frightened legislators. They are afraid to go home in this election year and tell the folks back home that they actually sided with evil Coleman.

Instead they have visions of being cheered by the masses for thwarting the big city. But the masses, if they do indeed oppose the subway, are wrong. And the legislators, if they're worth anything, should have the courage to tell the voters just that.

Livonia Mayor Ed McNamara, for whatever reason, has been one suburban leader to come out in favor of the subway which won't come anywhere close to his city.

In a recent speech he pointed out that the economic welfare of the entire area should take precedent over parochialism and fear.

He looks to Canada for inspiration. "The Canadians are so far ahead of us. But they have an attitude of doing it, the public be damned. It's coming to the point where many young people will probably never have to own a car," he said.

THOSE ARE WISE words in these days of political hysteria in Lansing. This entire region's economic future depends on the reputation of our core city.

When business contemplates investing in this area and moving its executives here, they don't pinpoint Livonia, Farmington Hills or Troy.

They ask, "What's happening in Detroit?"

In an important way, we all are part of Detroit when the world looks at us.

Get with it, legislators. Let's build the subway which will benefit all of us.

Charities need some rules

It's fund-raising time again. It happens every spring and every fall.

Organizations wait until the affluent return from their winter vacations in the sun or their summer vacations up north.

With this being an election year, charities have to compete with politicians for the scarce few dollars available in the community.

It's a necessary evil because government can't support all good causes, and the system allows the individual the opportunity to decide for himself what is worthwhile, hence supportable.

The problem is that so many approach the would-be donor at the same time, forcing him or her to make a choice based not on the merit of the cause but on the availability of dollars at that given time.

To lure the less committed, charities compete with clever functions. Our decision, then at times, is which function would be more fun to attend rather than which cause is the most deserving.

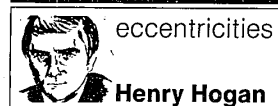
I WOULD HATE to see regulation rear its ugly head. But with the way fund raising is conducted, many times the losers are very needy organizations.

Charities have two ways to go. Either they can put on a function and invite a select group, or they can hire a fund-raiser and send out mass mailings.

If they choose the latter route, a large percentage of what they collect goes into mailing and printing costs, plus fund-raiser commissions.

First, the people contributing should be informed by any fund-raising literature how much will actually get to the charity and how much will be eaten up by solicitation and administrative expenses.

Second, charities should be forced out of existence once their goals are reached. We have seen national charities switch their projects after the dis-



eccentricities

Henry Hogan

ease they were fighting had been eliminated. The obvious reason for changing to a new project is to keep jobs for administrators of the fund.

Third, enclosing tickets to an event with a soliciting letter should be forbidden for political fund raising. While the recipient has no legal obligation to pay for unsolicited tickets, it plays on the guilt feelings of individuals and brings higher response.

If businesses sent out invoices for services they would like to perform for customers but hadn't yet been asked, the Post Office would investigate them for fraudulent practices.

TELEPHONE solicitations should be licensed and regulated because the public has no way of checking up on the organization if they have to make a decision on the phone. Hard-selling fund-raisers can easily defraud the public by intimidating people on the phone.

I am not trying to be negative about fund raising. It is an important function and the lifeblood of private charities. Without them, taxes would have to go up and many worthy organizations would be forced out of existence.

But the public should be protected and assisted in helping only those organizations where the funds actually go to the cause intended.

Passing of the Irish wake

At lunch the other day, our discussion turned to the lack of the customary enthusiasm in the celebration of St. Patrick's Day.

It isn't like it used to be, one of the diners said, when our grandfathers sang the old Irish ballads all day and danced the Irish reel far into the night.

Another spoke up and asked about the old clay pipes, claiming he read a lot about them but never had seen any except in pictures the old-timers brought with them from the Emerald Isle.

And whatever happened to the old Irish wakes we used to have?

TO THE UNINITIATED, an Irish wake was a gathering of mourners at the home of a deceased friend.

The casket of the departed was on view in the parlor (another term now in the limbo of forgotten things). A black crepe on the front door let passers-by know that a member of the family had departed.

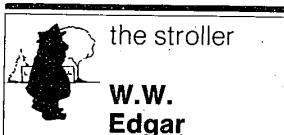
The mourning period started when the casket was placed on view. Neighbors and friends gathered to pay respects, and then moved into the kitchen or living rooms to eat and drink and relate stories dealing with the life of the departed.

Many times these visits lasted far into the night. They were broken up only long enough to visit the casket room from time to time to say the rosary.

THE IRISH WAKE ended with the advent of the funeral home. Now there is just a few moments of neighborhood visits when a friend has departed. The custom of sitting around telling stories and imbibing a bit of Irish coffee and amber brew has passed on, as well.

Bud Schrader, retired funeral home director in Plymouth, has only a faint memory of the old-fashioned wakes.

"In all my time here," he said, "I can remember only one or two of the old-time wakes. They just don't have them any more — that is, the kind when friends gathered at the home of the deceased to drown their sorrow."



These old Irish customs are well remembered by The Stroller — and for a strange reason.

It was the custom when a person died at home that the neighbors would hasten to the home to wash the corpse. The Stroller's mother nominated herself as the official washer. So, The Stroller was on hand at many of these moments of sorrow.

AS THESE MEMORIES come floating back through the years, he well remembers the week that Kate Smith, one of our town's characters, passed away. Mother was on hand, as usual, and The Stroller sat in on the wake.

Kate was a stout woman who had a fiendish thirst for beer. Most every night she could be seen strolling down the alley to the corner saloon for a can of beer. She'd be laughing all the way.

Kate was a great entertainer. She'd invite friends in most every night for a round of pinocle — and to partake of the bucket of beer.

So, it was only natural that many of these friends turned out for the wake on the night before her funeral. As the midnight hour approached and the last farewells were being said, one of the mourners came back into the living room with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"Poor Kate," he said, "I figure she's going to be thirsty, so I just slipped a bottle of beer into her casket. I know she'd appreciate it."

No wonder those old-time wakes left fond memories.

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