

OBSERVATION POINT

'Image-Building'? It Doesn't Belong In News

By Philip H. Power

"What we want from the newspaper," said the Livonia city councilman, "is a good piece of objective image-building."

How in blazes can anyone—a newspaper, a reporter, even a public relations flack—engage in objective image-building? You can't.

Image-building, by its very nature, is not objective. If you're going to go in for image-building, you are not being objective, and conversely if you're going to be objective your reporting has absolutely nothing to do with image-building.

I think the comment of the Livonia councilman (who shall remain nameless) let slip lies at the heart of a vast and emotion-laden confusion of politicians and people in public life have about newspapers and what they are supposed to do. Now that the election is mercifully over, perhaps it might be useful to explore this area of confusion, if only to give our readers some idea of what we're trying to do with their newspaper.

ONE ASSUMPTION politicians have about newspapers is that it's possible to get a newspaper to be "for" them. That is, get the paper to run all kinds of

stories and pictures of the politician in question, not because they're newsworthy but just because the politician has some sort of in with the paper.

This assumption involves the politician believing that stories or pictures are run in the paper not because of the editor's news judgment, but rather because of some personal favoritism that has led the paper to push the interests of a particular politician.

As a practical matter, it's hard never to let personal relations between a politician and a newsman get in the way of objective news judgment. A city councilman may be friendly with a reporter, give him all kinds of news tips, and in the judgment of the reporter be doing an excellent job. It's hard for the reporter to eliminate all these considerations from his mind when he sits down to write a story or lay out a front page.

But that's just what this newspaper expects. Those reporters on our staff who have failed consistently to be objective are either dropped from the paper or reamed out.

News is news. Image-building is image-building. It's the job of the paper to report the news. The decision about

whether a particular piece of news about a politician is good or bad for his image is and must be up to the individual reader.

ANOTHER CONFUSION politicians have about newspapers is that when a story they interpret to be damaging to them is run, it is because the paper is out to get them.

This confusion assumes that people on a newspaper actually get together in a conspiratorial manner to stick it to a particular politician.

This, too, is a violation of the ethics of the business. A reporter may hate the guts of a particular news maker, or he may disagree violently with what is being said, but it's his responsibility never to let his personal feelings get into the story he writes. The facts of the story are what he's interested in—not the favorable or unfavorable image.

Practically, again, this is tough, mainly because people (including reporters, oddly) are human. But it's what we expect in this organization, and when it doesn't happen we are very unhappy.

ABOUT A YEAR and a half ago, I wrote an editorial which represented the paper's point of view on the matter of objectivity. I wrote it as a publisher of one month's duration, and nothing that has happened since has shaken my commitment:

"We will try to bring to these newspapers an informed and

probing curiosity about everything of local interest, from sewage to high school football, from racial discrimination to good recipes, from local politics to neighborhood goings on.

"We will do this in a way that reflects a newspaperman's most deeply held ethic: That there is a difference between fact and opinion; that statements of fact belong in the news columns and expressions of opinion belong on the editorial page. News is news; no real newspaperman wants to slant it. If a newsman wants to express an opinion, he writes an editorial . . .

"When, as publisher, I feel the Democrats are being silly or

stupid, I intend to say so in an editorial. I intend to do the same thing with the Republicans. "These newspapers will be run as newspapers, not as a vehicle for any one group, party, organization or individual. "For a newspaper must serve the public as a whole and not just a segment."

THAT'S PRINTER'S INK — NOT WHITEWASH . . .

Suburban
Catholic Writers
Quit Column
Over Encclical
Income Tax
Amendment
Not Author
Higher
Voters
Differ
Officials
Twp.

Emory Daniels Writes...

Home Rule? What's The Use?

If the main function of county home rule in Wayne County was to have provided more efficient government, then its defeat by voters was no great loss.

Furthermore, resurrection of the county home rule proposal will serve little to promote efficient county government until voters display more sophistication than they did Nov. 5.

Without exception, Wayne County voters elected incumbent Democrats to county positions. The Democrats were all incumbents because voters have cast straight party votes in county races since county offices were first created.

Not that there is anything wrong with Democrats. But no party has a monopoly on efficiency or highly qualified candidates. Yet, all Republican county candidates were ignored as the straight party vote returned the entire incumbent slate back to office.

IF COUNTY HOME rule were needed for more efficient government, then some of the incumbents must have been performing inefficiently.

Political parties need loyal supporters, but each party would admit that blind party voting results in a few untalented candidates getting elected.

Blind party voting also creates a condition where officials have little incentive to show aggressiveness while in office because re-election is assured next time around unless he is challenged by a fellow Democrat in the primary.

If it is the voters' wish to retain

all Democrats in office, at least the party organization could screen incumbents and weed out the deadwood by selecting a Democratic candidate to challenge the incumbent in the primary.

The county home rule act lacked the main ingredient for efficiency when the Legislature called for partisan county elections.

County voting patterns were known, and legislators could very well have decided to allow non-partisan county elections—they did in the 1909 City Home Rule Act. The inclusion of partisanship at the county level eliminated the potential for effective county rule.

THIS IS NOT a plea to have Republicans elected to county posts.

It is a plea to end one-party domination and its automatic return to office of unqualified candidates.

Until county voters begin voting for the man and not the party, county home rule might just as well remain a dead issue.

If the Legislature wishes to revive county home rule, then let it amend the act to provide for non-partisan elections. If not, then let county home rule remain in the tomb.

Any structural change in government will be offset by the operation of a few bad administrators who are given a one-way, life-time ticket to public office with little concern for that public.

You cannot separate home rule from who rules.

Tim Richard Writes

'...Nor Use Unscriptural Language'

In the last year, every high school in "Observerland" must have had some kind of internal squabble about dress rules—some of which got into print, most of which didn't.

And every major university has had some kind of student protest or even take-over of the administration building, all over some real or fancied problem with the real or fancied meanness of administration conduct.

Thus, it was with no small degree of interest that we recently stumbled across some genuinely reactionary rules, by today's standards—rules which, if imposed and enforced today, might well lead to a revolution of flowing blood.

TITLED AN "ESSAY of School Rules," they were adopted for a common school in Pennsylvania

after being "read and agreed to at a meeting of the School Committee the First Day of the Ninth Month: 1798." The rules said:

"1st Mind to have your Hands and faces washed and Heads Combed every morning before you come to school and be careful to be there by the time appointed.

"2nd Come into School quietly and Soberly, and when there be Quiet, still at your proper Business; and mind the instructions of the Teacher, move not from seat to seat, or go out unnecessarily, but one at a time.

"3rd Do not scribble in your own, or one another's Spelling, reading, writing or Cyphering Books; nor use one another's pens etc without leave.

"4th In coming to or going from School, behave with decency and sobriety, not differing with or purposely hurting or offending each other; mock not nor insult any person, neither stop on the road to play, nor make a great and unbecoming noise.

"5th Tell no untruths, or miscall one another, nor use the corrupt or unscriptural Language of you to a single person; also be Careful to Call the months and days of the week by their proper names as 1st 2nd 3rd etc and date your Books accordingly.

"6th Let none make bargains, Sell, swap, or exchange on any account at school.

"7th Let there be no Quarrels, fighting or challenging to fight, no wrestling or willfully provoking one another to anger in or out of school, no throwing dirt, sticks, stones or snowballs.

"8th and Lastly let these rules be observed by all, and if any willfully trample and despise the

good order of the school, after being coolly admonished without manifest signs of amendment with the approbation of two or more of the Committee, they are to be discharged."

WE PASS THE Pennsylvania School Committee's rules on with neither our endorsement nor our

disapproval, and only this observation:

Today's kids may and do look swinish and unsanitary, but this editor can testify that they generally write more succinctly and spell more accurately than their ancestors.

Looks as if the kids can't please everybody.

Leonard Poger Writes

Patrolman Treutler Wins By His Merit

Crime in the streets and law-and-order were not the only things concerning the Garden City Police Dept. last summer.

Nearly a month was taken up with the appeal and Civil Service Commission hearings for Patrolman Alex Treutler, suspended by Police Chief Robert Behrendt for alleged misconduct in a local restaurant during his off-duty time.

Treutler won the case but lost a number of paychecks through a commission ruling. But he was reinstated to the force just a few days before his wedding in early July.

The incident involving Treutler's suspension came soon after

the Garden City Police Officers Association was formed.

Some officers claimed that the chief was opposed to the formation of the association and was punishing Treutler for his role in forming the group.

Behrendt denied it, and the defense rested.

There would really be no need to raise the issue again at this point except to remind Garden City residents that the chief and Mayor Timothy Murphy awarded citations to 19 officers for quick and alert police action in catching persons with dishonorable intentions.

Among those getting three citations was Patrolman Treutler.

Freedom Loses To The Ballot

Political fuddy-duddies are continually concerned about the "right of the people to vote" for meaningless offices and on long batches of propositions.

To a lesser extent, the people themselves tend to be free in signing referendum petitions and in opposing ballot-shortening measures such as county home rule.

Well, the people got it good and hard on Nov. 5.

How long did you stand in line to vote? If you got to the polls early, you were in line only an hour and a half or so. Later, it went to two or three hours.

To some extent, the fault may go to cities and townships called to provide enough precincts, but that was a rare thing.

For the most part, the problem was the long ballot. People had to vote on lists of offices they didn't understand sought by people they

couldn't possibly know anything about.

Why is it necessary to elect an auditor? Whom did you vote for auditor? Did you know anything about him other than his party?

Or for the M.S.U. trustees? Or the U. of M. regents? Or drain commissioner? Who were the candidates for drain commissioner, anyway?

Propositions? Well, there were five state proposals, one Wayne County, one Oakland County, a community college matter in part of Wayne.

Yet political fuddy-duddies continue to fight to keep meaningless offices and detailed propositions on the ballot. They talk about "freedom," but how free to vote are you when the ballot is so long that you can't vote it intelligently?

editorial

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SENSE 'N' NONSENSE

Some Rotarians go to great lengths not to miss the monthly Rotary Club meeting. A case in point is Dr. Kenneth Carman, M.D. from Garden City. He was attending the Olympic Games in Mexico when the Garden City Rotary Club was holding its meeting. Dr. Carman met his obligation by joining the Mexico City Rotary Club meeting featuring the National Ballet of China.

Which goes to prove geography has no limitations for Rotarians.

They have their work cut out for them.

—Leonard Poger