

Bit By Bit, Counties Get Shaped Up

Bit by bit, year by year, counties have been correcting their collective reputation as a sort of "dark continent of American government."

Time was when counties were simply administrative arms of the state, performing only legalistic functions such as recording marriages and deeds, prosecuting crooks and providing courtrooms.

Counties have no single administrative head and have been overseen by large boards of supervisors. A Republican of liberal municipal tendencies once characterized his county's board as "the Split 'n' Whittle Club." He was dead accurate.

In the post-war years, counties got increasingly into engineering-type services rather than legal-type services.

Most progressive counties have a planner, a highly important sort of coordinator in an era when the automobile has made the six-mile square township an unrealistic base for land use studies.

Counties have become involved with water and sewerage services, commonly serving as an agent for suburbs in dealing with a central city that provides the water and treatment plant.

One day soon, counties may even get into the property assessing game.

THE NEW STATE constitution allows county home rule. In theory, counties should be allowed to revise their departmental structures and have non-partisan government, if they wish. The Legislature so far has done a miserable job in allowing the kind of wholesale reform that is necessary, but there is hope. A couple of years ago, the Legislature passed a law requiring counties to reorganize their boards on a one-man, one-vote basis. A Livonian, then-Rep. Marvin Stempien, a Democrat, had something to do with that. It's difficult, incidentally, to make partisan generalizations about counties. A good deal of the agitation for county reform

has come from progressive Republicans; yet rural-minded Republicans have often formed an unholy alliance with the more partisan, hard-nosed Democrats to retard reform in their fiefdoms.

SO LET US NOW give credit to Atty. Gen. Frank J. Kelley, who happens to be a Democrat, if you think that's important.

Last week, after the courts upheld the constitutionality of county reappointment, Kelley happily tipped over an old cart loaded with bad apples. From time beyond memory, county boards had been filled with township supervisors and city councilmen, mayors, attorneys and managers. They voted their home base interests.

(Township supervisors will often deny this. Yet if the charge be untrue, why do the same supervisors so vehemently oppose county reappointment and quake at the thought of cities and suburbs getting more seats?)

Anyway, Frank Kelley ruled that the court decisions had wiped away the old requirements that townships and cities have direct representation on county boards; he ruled that township and city officials may not serve on county boards, too; after Jan. 1, 1969, they may serve either the county or their local government—not both.

Counties, then, have been given a legal method of becoming independent. Counties are not to be federations of local governments but entities on their own.

This reform and others are necessary to make counties more vigorous because local governments are too small and too jealous of each other to handle the big jobs of the future—witness the sad spectacles of the disunited Farmington city and township or Plymouth city and township.

The county government moved another step toward the future. Almost certainly, the future holds more such steps. —Tim Richard

Small County Board May Not Work Out

It may be quite obvious to those directly involved, but for others it may take a while before the full impact is felt of the recent Circuit Court decision confirming the reduction in the size of the Wayne County Board of Supervisors.

The present 130-member board will be cut to 26 members, elected on a partisan basis by voters in single-member districts.

WHEN THE NEW county board is organized and fully operating, the outlying sections of the county will really feel the impact of a lack of representation on the board.

For instance, the present board has a sheriff's committee for the department which handles the police protection for most of the suburban area outside of incorporated cities.

But with a much smaller board, those sparsely-populated townships will have no real impact on how the police protection is provided.

With a much smaller board, townships will have no direct representation on the board, and the townships are the communities directly affected by the degree and effectiveness of the police protection afforded by the sheriff's department.

With a smaller board, each board member will have a larger territory to represent, which really means that he

will be forced to give less time to each community in his district.

A smaller board does not necessarily mean that it will operate more efficiently than the old board.

The problem with the present board is not its size but just the structural aspects of county government.

Although elected officials are supposed to be responsible to no one except the voters, they are forced to submit continually to board members who are actually appointed to the county board, not elected.

And those responsible persons are not responsible to those people who appoint them, who do not necessarily have the general public in mind.

THERE IS AN OBVIOUS need for better representation and organization on the county level, but the new smaller board to come into existence this year may not be the best way of achieving that goal.

In all probability, the new county board's future holds only the prospect of elected and appointed officials and administrators arguing about lines of authority and responsibility.

The state Legislature had an excellent chance to iron out the problems but it missed the opportunity.

—Leonard Pogor

From the Publisher's Desk— OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power

What can you say?

What can you say to explain why the Americans choose to settle their political disagreements with murder?

How do you explain why yet another great leader of this land has been shot down by an assassin?

What process is necessary to figure out why a man who

preached reconciliation of people and urged the elimination of violence was himself slain?

What do you do even to be proud of this land, where murder with guns has now become nearly a way of life and where our political figures are more in danger of being slaughtered than of being defeated at the polls?

I DON'T KNOW.

All I know is that yet a second

time a man named Kennedy has been murdered. All I know is that some nutty Jordanian immigrant walked into a hotel in that most insane of all cities, Los Angeles, and shot down a human being at the point where he might just possibly have had the presidential nomination in his grasp.

And all I know is that he left behind him, 10 children, a pregnant wife, and a family too well

accustomed to grief.

What do I feel? Desolation. Pain. And fear for our country.

FEAR FOR OUR country, because there is great danger that the lessons of the murder of Senator Robert F. Kennedy will be totally and dangerously misread. For there is an argument now going on about the meaning of the murder. One side claims that the only issue is law and order, that there is nothing wrong with America that clamping down won't cure, and that introspection into our nation's soul is pointless because the assassins of the two Kennedys were obviously mentally ill and therefore cut off from the real nature of our society.

The other side claims that to stress law and order is proper but that it misses the point, that there is indeed something wrong with America, and that it is urgently important to scrutinize just what is happening in this country in order to do something about it before it is too late.

OBVIOUSLY, the matter of law and order is important. Within certain limits, it happens to be one of the crucial underpinnings to any society. If we are to have just laws, they must be enforced; if we are to have a free people, they must have the protection that order provides that they might be free.

But to stress the matter of law and order, at least as it pertains to our habit of killing people, does not meet the heart of the matter.

For France, a country for nearly a month in anarchy with an almost total breakdown of law and order, has not seen assassinations by gunfire. Riot police have smashed heads with truncheons and students have thrown rocks; but neither side has had to face the lurking sniper.

In England, political debates are fierce, but people do not shoot other people to settle them. Even in hot-tempered Italy, assassination is nearly non-existent. (Deaths due to gunshot injuries for America are by far higher than for nearly every other country in the world.)

One conclusion is possible from the evidence: There is something about America that leads people to shoot other people, including our highest public figures.

BUT BOTH Oswald and Sirhan were crazy, comes the rejoinder. They have nothing to do with any sickness in our society because they, themselves, were sick. True, these men were mentally ill. But just to say that is to miss the point.

Their actions were symptoms of a greater problem. While the problem encompasses society, they expressed it as individuals.

There is something violent about this land, perhaps because of our frontier heritage, perhaps because of TV programs, perhaps because of something else. But it is a violent country, and in it people choose violent means to take out their fears and hostilities. Just take a look at the way gun registration figures for Livonia rose after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, earlier this spring.

And there is something intolerant about this land. Negroes know it, just as does anyone who tries to argue for an unpopular position.

Take our violence, couple it with our intolerance, add guns in nearly every house and you have a guaranteed recipe for danger, trouble, and murder.

If we don't start looking at this strange combination and if we allow ourselves to be bemused by cries urging only law and order, this country could be in for the most turbulent and dangerous period its history has known.

AND AGAIN WE ASK WHY...

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SENSE 'N' NONSENSE

A SPECIAL OSCAR for the best "actor" over a long period of time should have been awarded last month to John Shiven of the Garden City Post Office. John has been serving as Acting Postmaster since January, 1968, and has been waiting, sometimes impatiently, for word from Washington, D.C., telling him he can keep the position.

Legislators have quietly strangled a notion to build a legislative apartment building, a sort of pad away from home for lawmakers during the sessions.

Here's the real compelling reason why:

"I'm satisfied with the apartments I can rent here in town," said Senator Garland Lane (D-Flint).

"I don't want to work with them all day and then live with them at night. I want to get away from them a little and relax." That's telling it like it is, Gar, baby.

Missionary in Africa said his work would be easier if the church did not take such an adamant stand against polygamy and let the folk have as many wives as they want.

Let's ignore the whole indelicate business, he suggests.

That's our kind of missionary.

The ad men are having a tough time coming up with new superlatives to describe the jobs laundry products will do. And by the time they put bleach, softener, detergent, rinse-white and all the other magic aids the ad men sell, into the automatic, housewives are having it tough finding room for the clothes.

There is already talk of HHH putting Edward Kennedy on the ballot as a vice presidential candidate. It presupposes that a Kennedy will settle for second place. Masterful strategy but let's hope it doesn't happen.

Robert Kennedy, like his late brother, John F. Kennedy, was dissatisfied with the way things were going. Vietnam, the welfare programs, the approach to the race problem.

He didn't claim to have the answers but he was searching. Look around and determine who in your own business or shop is eager and imaginative, working on ways to do things better.

Most of the paycheck jockeys are over at the water cooler, on their "coffee break," or staying overtime at lunch.

CHECK THE GUY who skips

This Is The Week That

... By Don Hoenshell

Senator Robert F. Kennedy's murder is just as important in the living rooms and poolside of our country as it is in the highest political councils of either major persuasion.

He died at the age of 42 at the hand of a Jordanian immigrant who couldn't care less about the niceties of briefcase politics.

Briefcase politics are the issues, the white papers and the long-range philosophies by which we in America chart our future.

Robert Francis Kennedy combined briefcase politics with power, a combination that makes it big. He had ideas and the clout to impose them on society.

There have been tears and anguish in the death of Robert Francis Kennedy. There have been outpourings of honest love for the runt of a distinguished family who had to fight for life and success.

He lost it all from a cheap .22 caliber gun in the hands of a kid. It doesn't help here to discuss the meaning of two Kennedy deaths which gained nobody anything but lost a great deal for us all.

THE REAL TRAGEDY of the murder is still to be weighed.

Sirhan Sirhan will have done the nation real and lasting damage if those who supported Kennedy now give up, if they take a Brodie off the philosophical bridge.

Whatever he was in terms of power, Kennedy had ideas and goals which the nation should yet consider. Ruthless? We've had township supervisors more ruthless.

Who's to carry the torch that died in Los Angeles?

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CHECK THE GUY who skips

lunch to get out extra work, the one who works overtime in a 9-to-5 day because he forgot to look at the clock. That's the one who is going to make your business go.

And that was Kennedy, who was overshadowed by his father and his brothers, the one who decided to make it on his own and did. During the campaign it was said that what Bobby Kennedy needed most was another Bobby Kennedy.

Bobby Kennedy is dead.

But an additional tragedy threatens—if we forget, if the young man, with ideas stays out of politics, if the forward thrust lies buried in Arlington.

Whether you agreed with him or not, there's a way to honor his memory and that of all the others of his-kind.

Do something more than 9 to 5.

Rubbing Suburban Emotions

How to get a rise out of people in Observerland:

"A new high-rise apartment will be constructed at the corner."

"They (you can take your pick on who that means) are moving in next door."

"The tax assessment on the house has just been increased."

"The sewer assessment bill arrived."

"Johnny was sent from the Cub Scout den meeting because he hit another boy."

"What do you mean my son can't play? This is Little League, isn't it?"

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OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS

PHILIP H. POWER

Publisher

DALE O. PERIN

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RICHARD L. THOMPSON

Managing Editor

Member Michigan Press Assn.

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