

editorial opinion

Confrontation at city hall features political massacre

A political blitzkrieg was launched this week in Farmington Hills. For those who prefer to watch their violence on Monday night football, you missed a brawling of a show at this week's council meeting. Dick Bickus couldn't have done a cleaner job in mauling and beating Mayor Earl Oppenheimer than did councilmembers Joan Dudley and Fred Lichtman.

The mayor, for whatever ends, had requested that his colleagues submit questions for advisory referendum questions on this November's ballot. At the time it sounded like a good idea—to the mayor.

It's a cinch he's having second thoughts today. You see, the mayor is one of four councilmembers up for reelection this November. Mrs. Dudley and Lichtman aren't. Since Oppenheimer was the only councilmember to honor his own request by submitting ideas, it was a field day for the rest of the council.

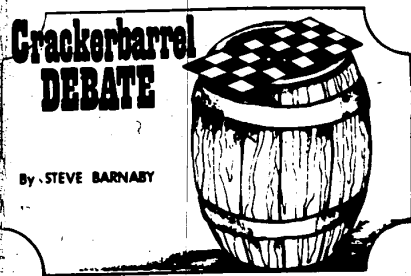
Now don't get me wrong. It's not that I feel sorry for the mayor. I've always had a hard time feeling sorry for political leaders. Persons getting involved in politics should realize the odds are littered with dangerous obstacles. Proposing advisory referendum questions is one.

SOME ARE WHISPERING the mayor proposed having advisory referendum questions on the ballot as a ploy to attract more votes for himself. Lichtman was a little more frank about the situation.

"If you want to campaign, get off the council table and on to the campaign trail," Lichtman bellowed at Oppenheimer during the heated 4½ hour debate over the wisdom of having advisory questions on the ballot.

It's surprising the mayor, who has been around local politics for quite awhile, opened himself up for such a flap. His being the only councilmember to propose advisory questions allowed the rest of the council to rip and tear at will. They did.

Not even the council's voice of compromise and unity, Bob McConnell,



could save Oppenheimer from the lions this week. Although two of the advisory referendum questions will be placed on the ballot, the credibility of such a move has been destroyed—perhaps along with Oppenheimer's political career.

Of course, not all councilmembers were so vocal as Lichtman. A resounding silence boomed from his right hand colleagues, William Orman, Jan Dolan and Keith Deacon, who all are up for reelection along with Oppenheimer.

As Mrs. Dudley and Lichtman did their work, the threesome silently sat with heads bowed. A person might think he was at a wake.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I keep on hearing an old saying: "You can't criticize a candidate who doesn't say anything." In defense of Oppenheimer, he did propose to do something about the issues. That's better than can be said for the rest of the campaigning councilmembers. A night of "Profiles in Courage" it wasn't.

But even though I'm usually a sucker for the underdog, I can't help but side with Lichtman's reasoning. Asking for advisory referendums is sort of silly.

MOST FOLKS NEVER read the questions until they got into the voting booth and even then don't know what the question means. If the question implies an additional service without raising taxes, most voters will bite. If a tax increase goes along with a question, it will more likely go down to defeat.

Another problem is that many voters may approve an advisory question thinking they are giving approval to a proposal and then get all upset when the government doesn't take action. Governments have enough problems with credibility without adding to an already bad image.

Another point made by Lichtman, with which I concur, is that only a minority votes, so a true tally of how the majority feels really isn't tabulated. But all in all, it was an interesting evening. The word must have seeped around the subdivisions about the coming flaccid, because the council chamber was fuller than usual with spectators. A lot of folks got their jollies watching somebody get creamed.

As for me, I wandered out of the meeting at 1:30 a.m., having seen enough. The gang was still there, with more than half of the agenda items left to consider. For all I know, they might still be there.

Eccentricities

by HANA HOGAN



Misguided consciences

Over the last four decades our social consciences have been tweaked to the point where we feel impelled to help certain social causes without looking at the long-run implications of our actions. The following are a few examples.

•THE GOAL IS integration.

Some psychologists decided that the way to solve the problem was by busing school children. The results now indicate that busing dilutes the available dollars for education and that, in fact, the total educational level of students goes down. While some blacks improve their educational level, they don't improve it as much as the level of education drops for the whites who are bused.

On top of that, busing encourages whites to move to the suburbs, out of the bused area, which increases the chance of a black ghetto in the core city. This, in fact, encourages segregation.

INGLEWOOD, CALIF. was one of the first cities ordered to use forced busing as a means of integrating its schools. A federal court has just ruled that Inglewood no longer has to bus, since its school population over the years has gone from 50 percent black to 92 percent black and busing is no longer necessary to achieve integration.

It is obvious, also, that busing is an emotional thing that leads to racial tensions instead of solving the goal of integration.

•THE GOAL IS a healthy economy.

Economists tell us that when the economy turns sour, the government should spend more money than it takes in to create federal jobs to soak up the unemployed.

While this may work on a temporary basis, once a federal employee is hired, the position becomes perpetual.

We have done so much deficit spending over the

last 10 years that today the Treasury Department is having difficulty funding our national debt.

This difficulty has raised the interest rate of treasury bills to the point where it is attracting money out of savings accounts at banks and decreasing the amount of money available for businesses to borrow for expansion.

If businesses can't expand, they can't possibly create new jobs.

In addition, the debt service for these borrowings has become so gigantic that it takes away from other social programs that Congress should initiate.

Lastly, when the government borrows money it, in fact, creates money and as the money supply is increased without a corresponding increase in production by the private sector, prices go up and inflation is caused.

•THE GOAL IS fair employment practices.

To make sure that state, county and municipal employees are treated fairly, many politicians have attempted to change the law to allow these employees to strike if they are not satisfied with their wages and working conditions.

In the past, the price of working for government with the security that it gives, was the prohibition against strikes, because they disrupt health, education and public welfare.

Today, teachers' strikes, police strikes, garbage collectors' strikes and transportation worker strikes are rampant.

Because of the sensitivity of their jobs, these people are in a position, by striking, to demand far more than their jobs ordinarily would command in the private sector.

The end result is poorer education, suspicion on the part of the citizens as to the motives of public employees and a lowering of the respect of the public for people who should be doing a professional job.

THE CONCLUSION has to be that when we take action to solve a problem, we must be aware of what the problem really is, not its symptoms.

Observation Point



Nobody wants a strike

by PHILIP H. POWER

Fall's here, and to subvert the old song, where have all the teacher strikes gone?

As everybody all too clearly remembers, last fall saw a whole slew of teacher strikes. Some were short and some were very long, but the overall climate was hostile and bitter.

By contrast, this year saw only four teacher strikes in the metropolitan area. Livonia's lasted only three days, and now all teacher contracts in the state are either settled or under negotiation while teachers work.

All this happened after the State Legislature and the governor failed to construct a new law replacing the current shambling statute on teacher strikes.

OBVIOUS QUESTION is why so few strikes this time around?

One factor is the economy. With deep recession and high unemployment, nobody with any sense wants a strike.

Another factor is symbolized by the release of John Melchor, chief negotiator for the Garden City Education Association, from jail last week. He served a 13-day sentence for contempt of court. Melchor refused to apologize for not obeying Wayne County Circuit Judge Charles Kaufman's back-to-work order last year during the 42-day Garden City strike.

Melchor's experience in DelCo suggested that teachers violating court orders could expect trouble.

A third aspect is shifting attitudes of the teachers themselves. Teachers appear to have recognized the financial problems local school districts face during negotiations.

"We are generally pleased with the gains we made," said Troy Education Association spokesman Sid Dickstein after a ratification vote. "We're unhappy with the low salary adjustment, but we realize that there is just no more money available."

A similar point was made by James Matteson, executive director of the Arondale Education Association (AEA). "It's not the intent of the AEA to force the district into bankruptcy or deficit spending. We're not bargaining a budget—just a decent salary schedule."

PERHAPS MOST important is the public's increasingly grouchy attitude toward teacher strikes.

An eloquent letter to the editor from a Livonia mother makes the representative point: "The school board that has had my support of millage for years, even when we didn't have children in school, has let me down. These are the same people that I supported by addressing envelopes, counting and distributing literature and making phone calls to get support for millage issues."

Teachers: how do I tell my child to respect you and your authority when you have no respect for his right to go to school? The same teachers who ask me as a mother to donate my time to type, run off stencils and help in class are now telling my child to wait, perhaps ruin next summer's vacation, but still have respect for them when they finally get ready to teach.

It is the public who in the end will determine the extent to which teachers can strike or negotiate expensive settlements. There are clear indications the public has had enough of strikes, and this certainly helped moderate teacher demands and reduce bargaining intransigency on both sides.

THE REAL ISSUE behind discussions of teacher strikes is, of course, the overall question of how to deal equitably with the problems posed by growing unionization of public employees.

School boards and mayors are ill-equipped in collective bargaining experience and face political problems if they depend on the votes of the members of the union with which they bargain. Public employee unions are tough and aggressive, and they sense that local governments—in theory—can always tax enough to pay for any settlement. Yet the public which consumes and pays for public employee services is not represented at the bargaining table.

National awareness of this problem has dramatically increased in recent months, mostly because the national media are run parochially from New York, which is in the worst shape. But in this case a serious defect in our national media system may have worked to the advantage of all, since New York merely may be further along the road to trouble than other cities.

And it might well prove that the case of public employee negotiations, as in so many other broad and important issues in our history, will ultimately be settled by the attitude of an aroused public. Alexander Hamilton said in 1788, "In whatever direction popular weight leans, the current of power will flow," and I can only hope that in this case he was right.

Presidential security

Does it hinder the press?

It's not nice to knock a hero—especially the man who saved our own President Gerald Ford—but the truth is that security around the chief executive is poor. The only thing the Secret Service protects him from is the press.

As a working newsmen I had that kind of experience last October when Mr. Ford was in Detroit's Cobo Hall for a Republican fund-raising dinner. I was appalled at how simple it would be to harm him, but refrained from writing about it at the time because I feared it would only encourage some nut.

Well, some nut figured it out for herself last Friday, so the story may as well come out.

TO GET PRESS credentials for the Ford banquet, you had to give your name, address and other data a couple of days in advance and pick up your pass several hours before the big show.

The press corps was relegated to a roped-off area where visibility and acoustics were less than desirable. Press photographers got to stand on a set of bleachers so far away that they couldn't use standard camera equipment; they had to use telephoto lenses.

Tracy Baker, star lensman from our Birmingham office, was doing the film honors that evening and came well-equipped, fortunately.

Myself, I don't care to sit with reporters at a political banquet, no matter what the seating arrangements are. Among themselves, newsmen brag horribly, and you can't get a good story out of them anyway.

Instead, I sat with the common ticket-buyers and had a much better time, not to mention a much better view. At my left

sure, I strolled up to the head table to ask a local state education candidate to shake Mr. Ford's hand so we could get a picture.

THE CANDIDATE quickly agreed, and I walked back to the bleachers to tell Baker to get ready to shoot—er, snap.

A Secret Service man with one of those bland, unmemorable faces told me to vamoose because newsmen weren't allowed outside of the roped-off area. I tried to explain I was giving directions to a photographer, but the Secret Service man was insistent—back to the quarantined area.

Stalling for time, I gave him some language out of "French Connection II" until I was sure Baker had photographed the right candidate with Mr. Ford; then I left.

THAT WASN'T the galling part. As an Archie Bunker-type lover of the good ol' U. S. of A., I respect the need for security and safety of the president.

The galling part was that common folks were leaving their tables and walking to within 15 feet of Mr. Ford and getting all kinds of pictures with their Instamatics and flash cubes. The Secret Service didn't do a blasted thing about it.

Anyone who bought a ticket to that dinner from the dozens of ticket sellers could have pulled out a pistol and very easily sent the president to the happy hunting ground.

Security around the president in Cobo Hall, as in Sacramento, Calif., was poor. The only thing the Secret Service protected him from was the press.

Farmington Observer & Eccentric

DIVISION OF SUBURBAN COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

STEVE BARNABY, Editor
352 5400

HENRY M. HOGAN, JR., Co-Publisher
PHILIP H. POWER, Co-Publisher

JOHN REEDY, Executive Editor
THOMAS REYNOLDS, Retail Advertising Manager
ARTHUR L. LANCER, Classified Advertising Manager

Member of
MICHIGAN PRESS ASSOCIATION
SUBURBAN NEWSPAPERS OF AMERICA
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION