

Senate approves pricing

Area state senators voted largely in favor of a unit-pricing bill requiring retail stores to hand-stamp a price on most items they sell. The labor-backed bill goes to the house, where it "should get a lot more work," according to one senate supporter.

Favoring SB 114 were Sen. William Faust (D-Westland), Bill B. Huffman (D-Madison Heights) and Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth).

Opposed was Sen. Donald Bishop (R-Rochester). Not voting was Sen. Daniel Cooper (D-Oak Park).

"I AGREE wholeheartedly with the concept," said Faust, "and I way on the committee that handled it—agriculture and consumer affairs—but it needs a lot more work. Members of our committee didn't have enough retail experience to write a good bill."

"Literally every transaction in the state is regulated under this bill. On the floor we were adding a lot of amendments that should have been handled in committee. There were exemptions for chewing gum, candy bars and suckers."

"This bill is going to be costly to consumers and it's all right as long as the consumers understand that," said Faust.

CHAIN STORES and merchants seeking operating economies from electronic pricing are expected to present stiff opposition in the house.

Electronic pricing refers to computerized checkout stations developed to read the Universal Product Code symbols pre-printed on many packages and cans.

Supermarket spokesmen and manufacturers of electronic scanning equipment have hailed electronic pricing as the big gest productivity breakthrough in generations—mostly because they are spared the cost of stamping prices on almost every item.

The retail clerks union, fearing the loss of jobs has mounted a national campaign for unit pricing bills.

SENATORS OPPOSED to the bill charged it was "featherbedding" for the clerks union.

Another called it a matter of "civil libertarianism and licenselessness versus iron-fisted control over business" and predicted it would cost consumers "billions."

Proponents said that without unit pricing, shoppers wouldn't know the price of an item until they get to the cash register, severely curtailing comparison shopping.

"BAIT AND SWITCH" tactics also are prohibited by the bill.

A grocery, hardware or clothing store would have to enumerate item quantities when advertising a sale, or else guarantee buyers a "rain check" if the supply of a product ran out during a sale.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. John Hertel (D-Detroit), said business can still realize 5 per cent of the original estimated savings promised under electronic pricing.

Economist blames unions for inflation

Consumers will be facing even more inflation this year, and Michigan State University economist says the fault lies with labor demands.

Patrick Larroze, professor of economics at MSU, says the 1974 contract negotiations will include what he calls "inflationary wage demands."

According to Larroze, the demands will be concentrated in five industries with the market power to pass increases directly to the consumer. The automobile, construction, trucking, rubber and electrical manufacturing industries will be seeking even more wage and benefit increases, Larroze said.

The professor believes inflationary contract settlements might have been curbed in the construction industry if President Ford had not vetoed a bill expanding the picketing rights of building trades unions.

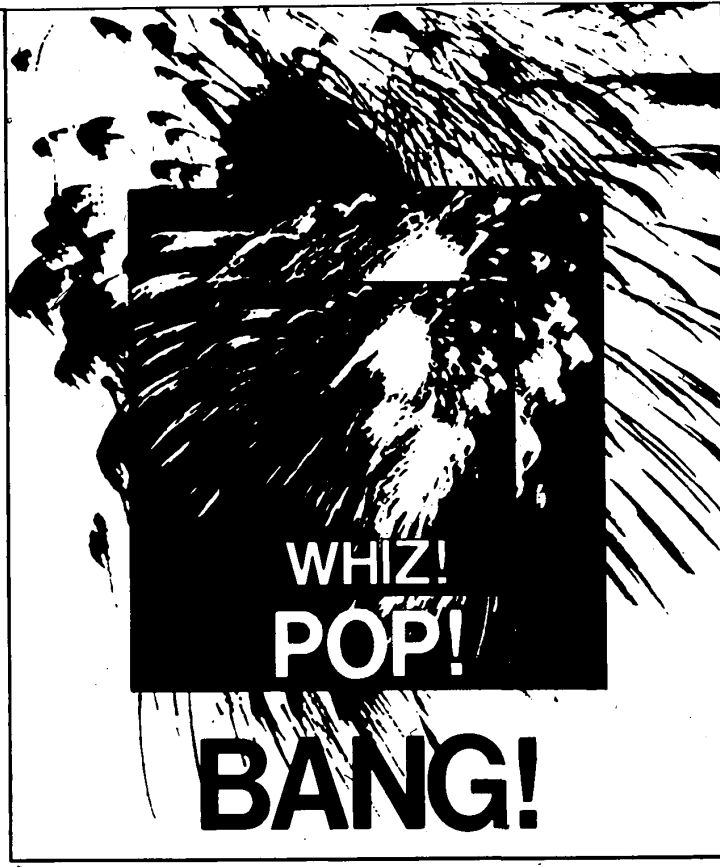
"Now the construction unions have no incentive to give up substantial wage increases," Larroze adds.

The MSU professor also says "Unions don't worry about unemployment being caused by wage increases, and those who are working don't usually think about those who are unemployed."

"People who are working assume they will still be working even though substantial wage increases sometimes cause layoffs."

According to the economist, the government's first priority should be to combat unemployment through public service employment and increased spending for people-oriented programs instead of for the military.

That means having permanent wage and price controls on products. "Wage and price controls worked during the Nixon administration and should not have been abandoned," Larroze says.



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