

editorial opinion

Capital punishment crusade is dangerous

Michigan's own Don Quixote once again has grasped his lance in pursuit of another windmill.

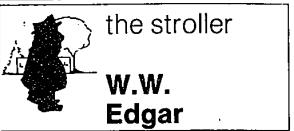
Over the years, he has entertained us greatly with his escapades. First we watched him grab onto Irene McCabe's miniskirt hem to gain statewide notoriety (though in court he was unsuccessful). Then, elected Oakland County prosecutor, we saw him attack the paramo "evil" of our society — the X-rated movie houses.

BUT THIS WEEK Oakland County Prosecutor Brooks Patterson has stopped being a political joke. His latest tack — to reinstitute capital punishment in Michigan, after 133 years — is just plain dangerous.

Patterson's holy war this year revolves around collecting 350,000 signatures to put the death penalty proposal on the 1982 ballot.

L. Brooks is confident he can pull off what State Rep. Kirk Holmes failed at last year — filling up petitions. You see, last year Patterson got a smell of blood when he engineered a successful drive which resulted in the elimination of early paroles for felons convicted of violent crimes in Michigan.

Like a shark, he hungered for real human blood this time.



A lifetime of changes

Growing old gracefully has its own rewards.

Slumped down in his favorite chair while the clock ticked off the closing seconds of his 82nd birthday, The Stroller got to thinking of the treasure house of memories he has of his long journey along life's highway.

It just doesn't seem possible that when he first saw the light of day in that little frame house back in the heart of the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Teddy Roosevelt had not yet made his famous climb up San Juan Hill.

The country at that time was just beginning to shout "Remember The Maine," the slogan of the Spanish-American War.

There was no such thing as paved streets.

Only the idle rich had indoor plumbing. The poor had to be content with a pot bellied stove in the parlor to heat the house.

Remember those grand old wood burning stoves with the windows in the doors?

And without indoor plumbing there was no special room for a bath. The usual facility was a wooden tub in front of the kitchen stove on a Saturday.

IN THOSE DAYS there were few opportunities for entertainment. At best the family had an old time Edison phonograph with the big horn.

If any one had mentioned that some day we could get pictures of current events on a screen in our living rooms, and in color, we would have considered him a bit daffy. Mention of a supermarket to replace the old corner grocery store would have brought the same reaction.

And the thought of an automobile! That was a wild moment, too, as Henry Ford had just begun to tinker with his idea of putting the world on wheels. There was little traveling. What was done was by horse and buggy.

And imagine this — there were no funeral parlors. When a person died he was buried from the living room of his home. The death was made known by the hanging of a black crepe on the door.

You can imagine the thrill that have been The Stroller's as he was here for the coming of the airplane, the automobile, and television. And he watched from his living room as Neil Armstrong landed on the moon.

THE OLD COOK stove has been relegated to the limbo of forgotten things.

The "out house" with the star and crescent on the door is only a memory, and paved streets and automobiles are now common.

As he sat there the other evening The Stroller recalled a chat he had with old Jim Mitchell during his early days in the nation's work force.

At the time, capitalists ruled the country. To get employment you had to live in a company house and confine your dealings to the company store.

At the end of the week you would receive your pay envelope, but your rent and grocery bill was taken out of it. In fact, the working man was little more than a slave.

Then one day Old Jim, chatting with The Stroller, prophesied that one day the working man would take command.

"They'll be hectic days, too," he predicted, "but there will come a day when the pendulum will swing back and both sides will meet at the bottom."

"You may not live to see it," he said, "but when that happens the world will be a better place in which to live."

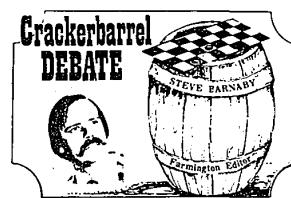
PATTERSON HAS YET to announce whether he prefers dusting off the gallows, dropping cyanide gas pellets, strangulation or crucifixion.

His logic goes something like this: Since rehabilitation of criminals has failed, let's burn 'em. Nice guy, this Brooks.

He labels capital punishment the "ultimate weapon of defense." Other persons have said the same thing about the atom bomb, but I wouldn't want to see that used either.

Sane minds have to go along with Gov. William Milliken, a far more credible political leader, who says that killing, no matter who does it, is wrong.

THE BATTLE against crime has been a frustrat-



ing one for American society. But adding capital punishment to the agenda, a genocidal move, would

be just another crime endorsed by society.

We don't need it.

Blacks have real qualms about capital punishment. If it were reinstated in this state, it won't be the white collar criminals who will be strapped down in millions of dollars a year who will be strapped down in the electric chair.

Candidates for execution will be, for the most part, impoverished blacks and Chicanos.

Look at it another way: Suppose you were on trial in Detroit and had to face Judge James DeRito. Remember, it took five years to get him removed. With the death penalty in his arsenal, he could have done a lot more damage. Do we really trust the Michigan judiciary with the death penalty?

Go back to watching dirty movies, Brooks. At least we could get a laugh out of you that way.



One chance on cable TV

Random thoughts on cable television:

For your local city council or township board members, selecting a cable TV firm is the biggest single decision they will make in their careers.

Figure it out. The franchise to use public rights-of-way lasts 15 years and will probably be renewed. Rarely do council members or trustees serve 15 years.

If the council picks a bum city manager, or if the township board picks a brute as police chief, the governing body can always fire the guy. If a spending program goes sour, it can be trimmed out of next year's budget.

But you're stuck with cable TV. Your choice had better be good the first time.

As Harold Horn from the Cable Television Information Center warned local officials recently, you'd better ask every company bidding for a franchise to supply a list of every town where it has done business and check the responsible local official in every single town.

A CABLE TV firm is much like a gas or electric company.

It usually needs a franchise from local government, although it's possible to cut a deal with the telephone company to use its wires and rights-of-way.

Like a utility, cable TV requires a high capital investment.

Like a utility, a cable TV firm rarely has a competitor in the same town.

One of the things a local governing body should check, Horn advises, is the bidding company's capitalization. Does the firm have enough capital to survive three years? It takes that long before it brings in any revenue.

ONE INDUCEMENT cable TV firms offer is the prospect of airing meetings of the local council, and maybe the planning commission and school board, too.

It's possible, now, to get a cable TV channel with sessions of the U.S. House of Representatives on it. I understand lawmakers who know the home folks are likely to see them have a propensity to ham it up.

I have mixed feelings about telecasts of local governing units.

As a working newsman, I've covered many a meeting where board members weren't talking to each other, but for my benefit. They knew I was trained to quote anyone who says anything of the slightest importance on a major issue.

I used to work in a town where the major local radio station would broadcast council sessions. I've heard the council's most demagogic member say one thing in the back room and quite another to the radio microphone.

And to tell the truth, I've heard good council members endeavor to "explain to the listening audience" things which deserved explanations.

The supreme editor, the news editor, the city editor and the chief editorial writer all listened to the broadcast. Next day, they would pore over the carbons of my stories.

If there was any item they heard on radio and didn't see covered, or didn't see adequately explained, I kept me grubbing for interviews and bits of information the broadcast didn't have. I set an all-time record for the most news copy out of a single council meeting — 194 column inches, in stories ranging from four to 24 inches in length.

(A year after I left the beat, an Irishman with a gift of gab produced 108 inches.)

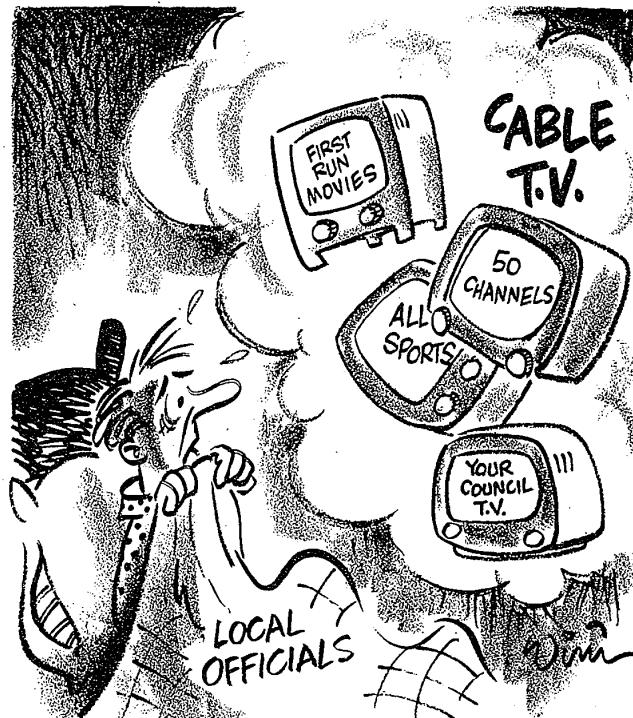
THE BEVVY of editors who fly-specked my work was a rarity. Most voters won't watch a full meeting of a governing board unless there's a neighborhood issue. And in that case, they're just as likely to attend in person.

So I don't expect us literary newsmen to be put out of business by the clucks with the cameras and microphones.

Most folks who are seriously concerned about public affairs scan TV news the way they scan headlines — to pick out what interests them so they can read all about it.

Actually, it would help society if folks actually did watch and understand city council, school board, township board, planning commission, community college, county board, SEMCOG and SEMTA proceedings.

There are plenty of other things we literary newsmen could cover.



Young slips

Transit plan endangered

Detroit is the only metropolitan area that doesn't have some sort of rapid transit system.

Historically, this has been blamed on our being the automotive capital of the world and the car companies having encouraged spending for roads and freeways to promote use of the automobile.

Detroit and Michigan, as a result, have one of the finest road systems in the nation.

There are two major problems with the way Detroit has been dealing with its transportation solutions.

First, not everyone has a car, and it is a very difficult region to get around without one.

Second, the worldwide oil problems and resulting scarcity and high price of gasoline will reduce the amount of driving people will do in the future.

Hence, metropolitan Detroit must catch up with the rest of the nation and produce a regional transportation system that will allow residents the means to move from one region to another.

TWELVE YEARS ago, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) was formed to put together a regional system.

It bought the existing suburban bus systems, which were all in financial difficulty; took over the Grand Trunk commuter trains from Pontiac to Detroit, and developed the beginnings of a demand-response small bus operation (Dial-a-Ride) for less populated areas where large buses are inefficient.

On Dec. 18 — less than three weeks from now — SEMTA is scheduled to decide on what else should

Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN JR.

be included in the first phase of a comprehensive plan for the region.

Public hearings are now being held throughout the region so that the public can see, hear and talk about the proposals being considered.

THE ONLY REALLY controversial proposal is a light rail line extending from downtown Detroit to Eight Mile. This line would be partially underground and partially elevated.

This would be the first phase of a subway system through the area, which might take 50 years to complete.

Many suburban public officials have come out against this plan because they believe too much of the available money being spent in the city of Detroit, while the region as a whole would have to pay for the operating deficits that will result from any public transportation system.

Coleman Young, mayor of Detroit, in the past has gotten the votes for this subway system by promising goodies for suburban interests, such as a "super sewer" for western Wayne County.

HOWEVER, JUST as the SEMTA board is about to vote on the final system, he has pulled what could best be described as a "fouz pas."

Young announced he won't permit merger of the Detroit city bus system into SEMTA unless the SEMTA board is reconstituted from five city and 10 suburban directors to four for each with a ninth member selected by the other eight.

If this were to come to pass, it would mean he would be pushing to remove some SEMTA board members who have voted for his program in the past.

Unless the mayor changes his direction very quickly, it wouldn't be surprising if either the SEMTA board were to delay its decision until after Dec. 18 or the subway were excluded from the plan.

The writer is a SEMTA board member from Oakland County.

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