

OBSERVATION POINT

This Convention Seeks To Bring In People

By Philip H. Power



They're going to have a convention in Detroit next weekend. Maybe "they" is the wrong word, because only one party is convening this time around. As any follower of politics knows, the Democrats and the Republicans always hold conventions a week or two apart, and for the same purpose. One time it's to nominate candidates for jobs like secretary of state and Michigan State University trustees. Another time it's to elect a state chairman.

But this time only one party--the Democratic--is meeting. And they're meeting in a special convention for a highly unusual purpose, if you know politics. The party will discuss reform. Reform of itself. Reform of the voting process. Reform of the electoral process. To put it another way, they're going to take a look at some ideas. And that's very unusual be-

cause politicians ordinarily discuss candidates and money. **WHY ALL THIS** reform talk? Didn't the Democrats carry the state for Hubert Humphrey in 1968? Didn't they capture the State House of Representatives and do a (sorta) respectable job on the state education posts? That's not a perfect record, granted, but the party seems basically not out of touch with the people and is still capable of winning. So why reform?

Well, a lot of people haven't been too happy about the speed with which either party responds to the changing needs of society. They think the party structure is too remote from the people. They'd like to have a voice in what goes on, a chance to take part. "Involvement," I think, is the slogan they're using.

So the Democratic state chairman at that time, a very capable guy named Sander Levin, appointed a commission to discuss party and electoral reform and then write a report. He picked the highly respected University of Michigan scholar, William Haber, to head the commission.

NOT EVERYONE agrees with everything the Haber Commission is proposing. But there's no getting around this point: No party in any state in the country has moved so positively and so strongly to implement an idea--the idea that more people ought to have a say in how their government is run.

Right now, Michigan sends delegates to the Democratic and Republican national conventions--where the presidential ticket is nominated--by a process that has little to do with the people. Those delegates aren't elected. They're

picked at a state convention by other delegates picked at county and congressional district conventions. Those county and district delegates come from the precincts, and they're elected two years earlier. That's hardly representative government!

Sure, a lot of people are finding flaws with the presidential primary plans that are being talked up, both by the Haber Commission and other elements in the party. But the point is that nearly any kind of reform is better than the drawn-out, indirect, ossified process we now have.

There are a lot of people who can't vote because of the restrictive registration processes we have. Some reformers think a mobile society like ours shouldn't have long residency requirements before you can register:

that there ought to be longer hours and more convenient ways to register; that the guy who maybe doesn't vote for two years shouldn't find his registration canceled; that a man who's in jail awaiting trial shouldn't be prevented from voting if he's not yet convicted.

Sure, you can pick apart a lot of these reform ideas. But the point is that here's a party that's at least trying to discuss reform and come up with constructive ideas for change.

THERE IS, however, a certain cloud over the convention. Sandy Levin wants to run for governor. Former Detroit Mayor Jerry Cavanagh, former party chairman Zolton Ferency and State Sen. Roger Craig of Dearborn have made a pact, and one of them will run against Levin for the Democratic nomination later this year.

So the backers of Levin, Cavanagh, Ferency and Craig will be doing a lot of politicking this weekend to line up support for their candidates.

I for one hope that the Democrats won't get so absorbed in those four personalities that they'll lose sight of the goal--reforming the party and the political process, giving more people a voice in the political process.

There's an old saying: "Small minds discuss personalities; medium-sized minds discuss events; large minds discuss ideas."

The Democratic Party of Michigan will meet this weekend, at the prompting of large minds. To discuss ideas. Here's hoping they don't get so involved in gubernatorial candidates that they lose sight of the goal.

DISSENT

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers, Inc., but are presented in the belief that publication of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

Plymouth Ex-Chief Speaks Up

EDITOR'S NOTE: The writer was chief of police in the City of Plymouth for about a year prior to the time Chief Herbert Straley took office. He is now in police work in the Flint area.

By ROBERT CORRINGTON

As you know, I had the honor of being the chief of police of Plymouth prior to the advent of Herbert Straley. I still feel very close ties with the city and especially with the police department. I was very disturbed at the extensive article in the Detroit Free Press of Jan. 8. (The article consisted of charges that Straley is using Gestapo methods and harassing young persons.) I can find no fault with arresting people who violate the law, and the sentences meted out are not the blame of any member of the police.

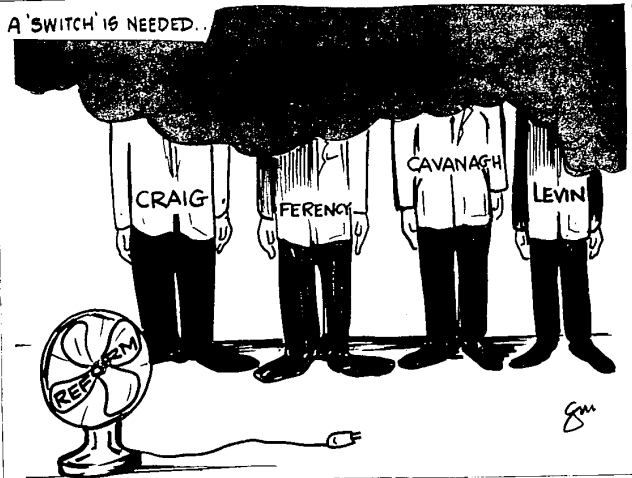
What I do hate to see is the obvious dissatisfaction and cleavage of at least some members of the police department. When the present chief assumed office, he had, I am proud to say, a closely knit, efficient, aggressive force. It is too bad that the men have had to choose sides.

I RESENT very deeply the quote in the paper attributed to Chief Straley to the effect that Plymouth had "no effective law enforcement" before he came here.

I have to take that as a direct reflection upon my ability as a police administrator and will be happy to place my record with his at any time. We had a department with good morale and were respected throughout the Wayne County area. We were also commended for the best job of policing done in the area during the strike at Michigan Bell.

There is more to "effective law enforcement" than arrests for their own sake. If an arrest does not accomplish anything, then better if it has not been made.

I look back at my taking Mr. Straley to Plymouth, introducing him around and recommending him highly. It would seem that I, as did Cleopatra, "nursed a viper at my bosom."



Tim Richard writes

Is Speed The Reason For Deaths In Snowmobiles?

Why are snowmobilers getting into so many accidents and arousing so much wrath? What can be done about it? Age (or rather youth), liquor, night driving, and a hoped-for emphasis on speed seem to be part of the answer. Tougher laws can be passed, but they will be difficult to enforce.

State police records show that of 661 snowmobile drivers involved in accidents last year, fully 16% were age 15 or under.

Our automobile laws prohibit persons that young from driving unaccompanied by an adult. When one considers that the snowmobile is

legally a "vehicle" and is often as swift as a small car, it seems logical to pattern the snowmobile law after auto law.

This is not to say that young teens are responsible for all snowmobile accidents. The 16-24 age group accounts for nearly 20%, and the 25-34 age group racked up 26%.

Liquor was certainly a factor in some snowmobile mishaps. State police figures show 100 of 601 drivers admitted they had been drinking (they had no information on the other 60).

Darkness was clearly a factor. Of 573 accidents, 251 (or 44%) occurred at night, and another two dozen occurred in the dim light of dawn or dusk.

driving crosscountry, not on trails.

Snowmobile associations boast that they emphasize pure fun and safety as well as speed. The truth, however, is that their publications put far more emphasis on racing than on safety.

One manufacturer, in particular, encourages a speed psychology in naming its products: Mustang, Charger (with "Torque-O-Matic" transmission), and TX ("the high-performance champion").

BEFORE ANYONE suggests a "crackdown" on snowmobile drivers, consider the difficulty of that task. By the time a law enforcement officer can arrive on the scene, the offender is long gone, into the woods. It's not like policing city traffic.

Some legislation would help--notably, prohibiting young teenagers from driving snowmobiles. But if sanity is to be restored to our woods, snowmobilers will have to control themselves.



"A SPEED psychology" is certainly encouraged by the snowmobile industry, whose advertising emphasizes racing, "thrills" and soaring excitement. This photo was provided by a manufacturer.

R.T. Thompson writes

They Can't Afford Homes They Own

"The wheel of fortune...Round and round it goes and where it will stop nobody knows."

There was a time not so many years ago when this was a popular saying in most households. It was the theme of a nationally famous radio show that went on and on until its popularity waned and it vanished from the air lanes.

But similar words are being heard on all sides these days in the northwest suburbs and most every other section of the state.

THE WORDS ARE SIMILAR but not the same and go something like this: "Michigan property taxes go up and up, and where the ceiling is, nobody knows or can even guess."

This became a familiar refrain in late December when homeowners everywhere received their tax bills and were, in most cases, shocked when they discovered the amount due was much higher than the previous year.

It makes one wonder if those who joined in the Michigan Constitutional Convention to draw up a new constitution for the state were aware of what would happen when they set a statewide uniformity of assessment by ordering properties to be assessed at 50% of the true cash value.

Most certainly there were inequities in assessments in every governmental unit in the state, and the aim of the Con-Con was to level property taxes in every section of Michigan.

But little did they realize that inflation would rise and drive assessments up and up with a corresponding increase in taxes--a hike property owners detest because it is one they have to accept without having the privilege of voting on it.

There was a time when the ambition of every young married couple was to have a home of their own--paid for.

No longer is that true as many of those approaching retirement are learning. Rapidly increasing assessments have placed many couples in a position where they own the property but would be unable to keep it if they have nothing but Social Security to depend on after age 65.

forward to but social security and their savings and investments.

Their home is paid for, has been for some time, but the reassessments of the past three years have placed them in a position where they own a home and can't afford to live in it during retirement.

Their situation is this. Three years back, the home was assessed at \$7,500 and the taxes totaled \$408. That was in 1967. Then came the tax bill for 1968 which showed the home was now assessed at \$12,500 and the taxes had increased to \$694.

Presumably that brought the home to 50% of the true cash value. Imagine their consternation when they received the tax duplicates for 1969 and discovered the home was now assessed at \$14,000 and the taxes had climbed to \$767 -- almost double that of 1967.

And there isn't any reason to believe that the local assessor won't boost the assessment, in another year and hike the valuation to \$16,000 or more with a corresponding increase in taxes.

THEN THERE'S ANOTHER example in a second Observerland community where the taxes of a property owner jumped from \$720 in 1967 to \$804 in 1968 and now \$894 in 1969.

There are typical examples in this area. Taxes have more than doubled during a period when a retiree or a near retiree is faced with a fixed income. It isn't a question of whether one can't or cannot pay--the law specifically states taxes must be paid.

It's a sad commentary on modern living and modern government when a couple that has saved pennies for years to have a roof over their heads find themselves in a position where they can't afford to live in the home they already own and have paid for.

And that's just another reason why the Legislature should get moving on a tax reform program that does ease property taxes -- or else there are going to be a great many older residents who will have to sell the roof over their heads to exist.

PROPERTY TAXES have become so high that couples who have achieved the goal of owning a home just can't afford to pay taxes that average \$70 and more per month.

Just a few days ago we received a call from a resident of one of the six communities covered by the Observer Newspapers making a complaint that fits into the above described situation.

The couple, just a few years away from retirement, have never been employed by a company that has a pension plan. Thus they have nothing to look

Sense And Nonsense

"If the left doesn't get you, the right will" might be paraphrased a refrain from the song "Sixteen Tons."

With all the fear these days of annihilation by subversives, revolutionaries or just plain college kids, it seems only proper to remember that someone once said, "The greatest thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Editorial & Opinion
OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher

The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer • The Westland Observer
The Garden City Observer • The Plymouth Mail & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer

Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
271 S. Main Street, P.O. Box 200, Plymouth, Mich. 48170

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Farmington, Canton, Township, Farmington,
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland.